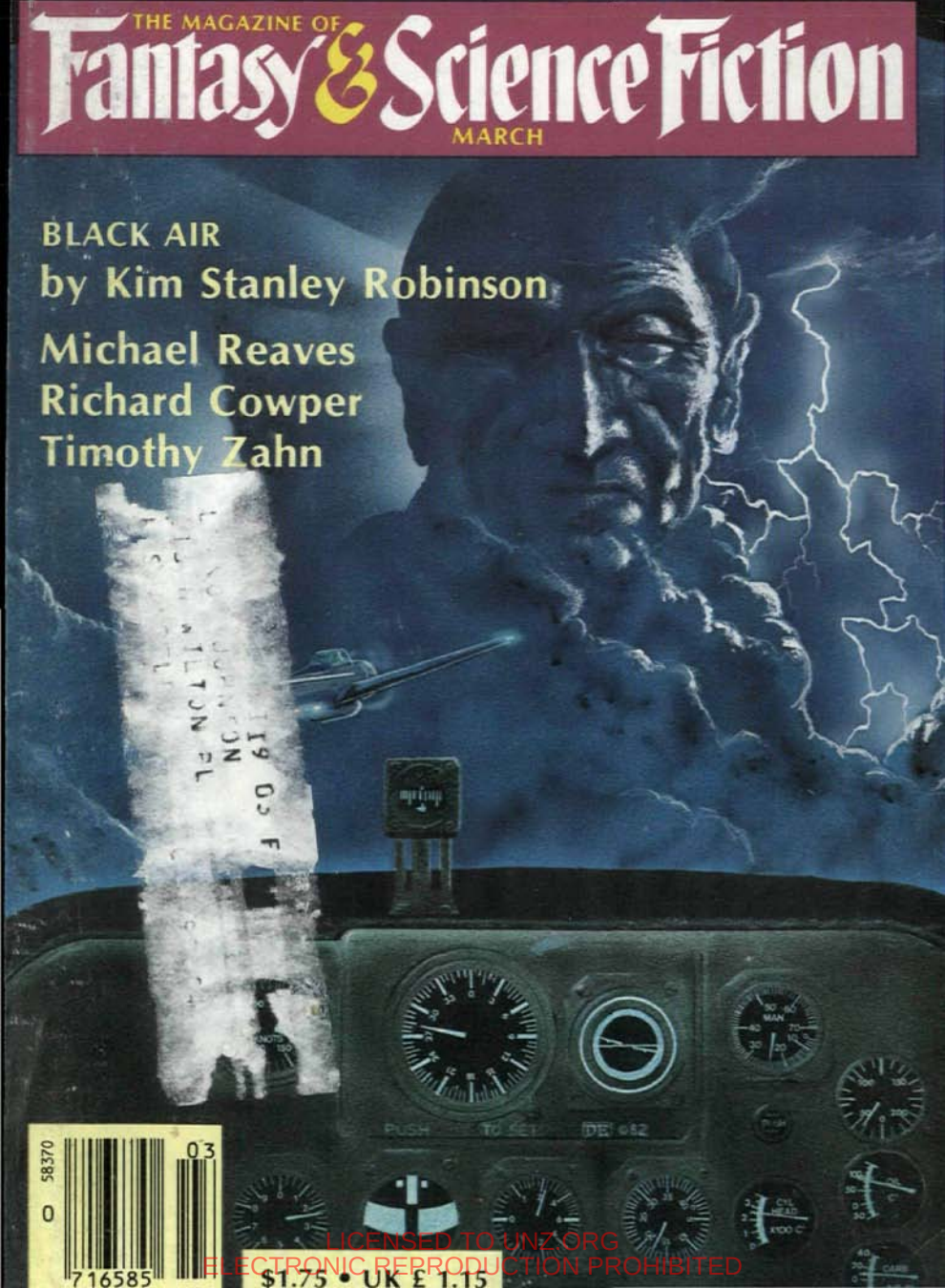
THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy & Science Fiction

MARCH



BLACK AIR
by Kim Stanley Robinson

Michael Reaves
Richard Cowper
Timothy Zahn

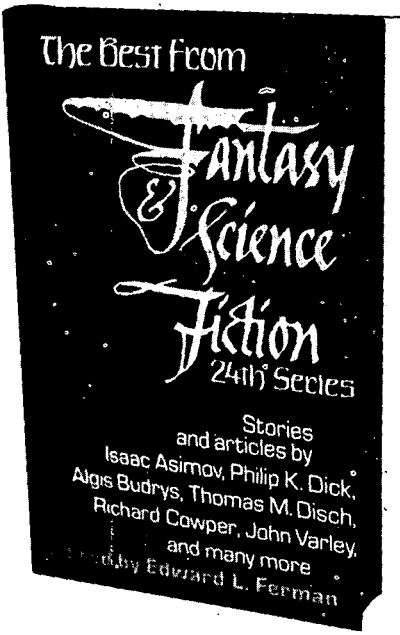
0 58370 03
716585

$1.75 • UK £1.15

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Together, these volumes comprise a comprehensive postwar library of superior SF and fantasy."

—Joe DeBolt and John R. Pfeiffer in Neil Barron's *Anatomy of Wonder*



THE BEST FROM FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, 24th Series
Edited by Edward L. Ferman
Scribners, $13.95 ISBN 0-684-17490-1
This latest in the 30-year-old series is a fine an anthology as you could hope to find, as befits *F&SF*'s tradition of high literary standards. Bob Leman uses shock to point up how deceptive appearances can be when one is looking through a strange "Window." Parke Godwin's "The Fire When It Comes" is a touching contemporary ghost story told from the ghost's point of view. Lisa Tuttle's "Wives" uses a most adaptive alien race to make feminist points. John Varley toys with our expectations about a man's odd interest in little girls to examine the human impact of time dilation in "Pusher." Michael Shea's "The Autopsy" is a small masterpiece of horror SF. "Out There Where the Big Ships Go" by Richard Cowper is the tantalizing story of a game that conquered the world. Thomas M. Disch's "The Brave Little Toaster" is an irresistible modern fairy tale. Other fine stories are by Neal Barrett, Jr., Eric Norden and the late Susan Petrey and Philip K. Dick. Insightful and informative nonfiction by Algis Budrys, Baird Searles and Isaac Asimov, light verse by Russell Griffin and the winners from five of the magazine's funny competitions add further enrichment to a thoroughly satisfying book. [*June*]

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

THE BEST FROM FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION
24th Series **Edited by Edward L. Ferman**
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS / A MAGAZINE OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION BOOK

100 copies only of this hardcover edition have been signed by the editor — $14.95 includes postage and handling

MERCURY PRESS, Inc., PO Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy & Science Fiction

Including VENTURE SCIENCE FICTION

MARCH • 34th Year of Publication

NOVELETS

THE TEARING OF GREYMARE HOUSE	4	Michael Reaves
BLACK AIR	133	Kim Stanley Robinson

SHORT STORIES

THE SHADOWS OF EVENING	41	Timothy Zahn
WELCOME TO COVENTRY	56	Richard Mueller
BROTHERS	68	Richard Cowper
WHERE DID YOU GET MY NUMBER?	83	Harvey Jacobs
SPUR THE NIGHTMARE	91	Edward Wellen
CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION	111	Felix C. Gotschalk

DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS	32	Algis Budrys
FILMS: Tube or Not Tube	80	Baird Searles
SCIENCE: The Armies of the Night	123	Isaac Asimov
ACROSTIC PUZZLE	158	Rachel Cosgrove Payes

CARTOONS: JOSEPH FARRIS (79), HENRY MARTIN (90), L. J. KOPF (110)

COVER BY DUNCAN EAGLESON FOR "WELCOME TO COVENTRY"

EDWARD L. FERMAN, Editor & Publisher — ISAAC ASIMOV, Science Columnist
DALE FARRELL, Circulation Manager — AUDREY FERMAN, Business Manager
ALGIS BUDRYS, Book Review Editor
Assistant Editors: ANNE JORDAN, BECKY WILLIAMS

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction (ISSN: 0024-984X), Volume 64, No. 3, Whole No. 382; Mar. 1983. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $1.75 per copy. Annual subscription $17.50; $19.50 outside of the U.S. (Canadian subscribers: please remit in U.S. dollars or add 20%.) Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A.

Copyright © 1983 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights, including translations into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Michael Reaves is the same J. Michael Reaves (he has dropped the first initial) who wrote "Shadetree," (September 1977) and "Werewind," (July 1981), both exceptional horror stories. His latest F&SF story is one of the best haunted house tales we've read in some time. Mr. Reaves has just sold his fourth novel, THE SHATTERED WORLD, to Timescape Books.

The Tearing of Greymare House

BY
MICHAEL REAVES

When he had first seen the old house, Lamar Warren had thought, I can make a pile of money off this job. His next thought had been, Ain't it a goddamn shame.

He had not wanted to take the job, despite the money to be made. But these were not good times for the wrecking business. The bank had him good, and their grip kept getting tighter. With the economy the way it was, few new buildings were being built, and so few old ones were being wrecked. The Warren Wrecking Company nearly folded this year. It didn't seem fair, Lamar had told his wife dryly, for the country to be falling apart without his even getting to swing a ball at it.

And so he had taken the Greymare job, despite his feelings about it. The contractor was a firm in Philadelphia, and they had not even taken bids — they had simply called and offered him a price he could not refuse. With that, and the salvage that was his, he stood to make a good profit. He tried to feel enthusiastic about that.

The truck lurched as one of the outside tires ground gravel on the narrow road's edge. George Colby cursed and wrestled with the wheel. "These damn roads ain't graded worth a damn," he said. "And there's another goddamn bridge up ahead," as the fifth in a series of narrow wooden creek crossings came into view. The wide GMC dump trailer barely squeezed through, and the old planks creaked ominously. Lamar watched in the side mirror as the crane truck and the rest of the caravan followed. They had a couple of irritated motorists behind the procession, he noticed. Well, that could not be helped.

The last truck rumbled over the bridge. "Our luck ain't gonna hold out forever," George said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's why I brought a light crane."

"Yeah, it ain't but three times as heavy as these bridges were built to take." George spat out the window. "I got a bad sense about this job, Lamar."

Lamar looked out the window. He had watched the wide rolling fields slowly give way to swampy land, shaded by cypress and filled with tiger lilies and palmetto ferns. He had never liked the lowland country. It was getting toward noon, and hot, the drowsy, humid warmth of early summer. It had been over an hour's drive to Blessed Shoals, the Shadman County seat, and it was nearly another hour from there to the job. Lamar grimaced. Four hours of travel time out of every day. He mopped his bald, sweating head with a blue handkerchief. It would be worth it, he told himself. Even with the overtime, the gas and hauling expenses, it would be worth it.

Still, he wished he hadn't had to take the job.

It was not because of Greymare's reputation. That did not bother him. But when the contractor had offered him the job he had driven out and looked at the place, peered in the windows and walked around the grounds. Greymare was a magnificent house still, despite its delapidated condition. It did not deserve to be destroyed. Lamar loved well-built structures, no matter what the style or period. He had no difficulty in reconciling that love with his work. Demolishing old buildings was a necessary part of raising new ones. He saw his work at times as granting a quick death to buildings that had grown old in service and deserved to die honorably beneath the crushing blow of the ball, rather than degenerate into ruin. The wife said he was crazy, but he didn't mind being a little crazy. Being a little crazy was the only way to stay sane in this world.

But this house was not ready to go. Despite its weathered exterior and broken windows, it was still in good shape; restored, it could easily last another century.

No, it did not deserve to be destroyed. But, he reminded himself, he did not deserve to go broke either. It was him or the house, and he did not intend to be the one brought down.

Because of the winding road and the trees, they were upon the plantation before they saw it. It was on higher land, surrounded by what had been rice and cotton fields and were now overgrown with witch grass and thistles. Greymare had once been the largest plantation in the state, before the Civil War. Lamar could see the overgrown clumps that had been the barn and outdoor kitchen and slaves' huts; rebuilt, he had been told, several times in an attempt to restore Greymare to the status of a landmark, but always abandoned and left to rot again. Nothing worth salvaging there; a single run with a dozer would bring them down.

The house, however, still stood, old but unyielding. It would take all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that they had to knock it down.

That's an odd way to look at it, he thought.

The truck's wide tires rolled across the overgrown lawn and stopped. Lamar climbed down from the cab stiffly, putting both hands over his kidneys and leaning backward to stretch. He watched the rest of the equipment arrive: the other dump trailer, the crane and forklifts. Following them were five old Ford Econolines carrying the crew, and a flatbed truck with the portable heads. Clouds of diesel smoke drifted low over the grass as the engines shut down. The crew disembarked, cursing tiredly about the long ride, a few finishing jokes and stories. All of them gradually became silent as they turned to stare at the mansion.

Lamar looked at them looking at the house. Some of the crew were new, for he had hired several men for loading and cleanup in Blessed Shoals. One of these, a young fellow named Jim Driffs, crossed himself as he looked at the house. Lamar looked at his own crew, most of whom had been with him for years. George Colby had helped him start the company nine years previously; the tall black man was one of his closest friends. He stood now beside the dump trailer, fingers hooked in suspenders, staring at the mansion.

Beside him was Alice, the crane operator, tucking her hair under her hard hat. Alice was the only woman in the crew; as far as he knew, she was the only woman in any wrecking crew in the state. She was forty-seven, a stocky, solid woman, not beautiful at all until one got to know her. She had lost a husband in Korea and a son in Viet Nam, and was possibly the best crane operator Lamar had ever seen.

Those two had been with him the longest. The others had joined as the firm grew — Freddie and Larry Tom, the drivers, Dawson, Pettus and the other loaders, and the trimmers and bar men. And there was Randy Warren, the latest addition to the crew. He was twenty years old, the youngest on the crew. He looked uneasy and out-of-place, too soft for the hard hat and coveralls he wore. Lamar frowned, wondering if he should have brought his nephew along. This was only summer work for Randy, before he went back to college. Lamar did not want any valuable scrap damaged due to inexperience. He shrugged. The boy deserved a chance.

The crew's silence he took to be what he felt: appreciation, even awe, for the majestic old house. Lamar walked through the tall grass, waving absently at the clouds of midges, and stopped at the steps leading to the wide, porticoed entrance. Leaning back, he admired the house. The style was mixed: classic pilasters were combined with Gothic gables, lancet windows and Tudor half-timbered walls. But the effect was unifying and impressive. Though it had stood vacant for almost five years and the storms and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seasons had weathered it sadly, still it was imposing. It was three stories tall, wide and sprawling. To keep most of the salvage it would have to be hand-torn, and that would take a month or more. Lamar sighed. It was a crime to do it — more than a crime, almost a sin, almost as if he were destroying a life....

"Lamar?" George had approached him and now tapped him on the shoulder. Lamar turned quickly, startled, and George retreated a step. "We'd better get started," he said quietly. "It's noon already."

"...Sure. Just daydreaming, I reckon. Let's get on it."

He glanced toward Randy and noticed the boy sitting in the shade of one of the vans. That annoyed him slightly — he hoped Randy didn't think he could slough off just because he was family. He did not know the boy all that well; Grace, Lamar's sister, lived in Atlanta, which was a considerable trip. Well, now he would see what Randy was like.

"Randy! Come on, we're gonna open it up. Get your boots and gloves — no telling what varmints have moved in." Randy looked up, then grinned reluctantly. Lamar nodded; the boy at least could make the best of a situation.

He named several others to accompany his nephew. To his surprise, not only Randy looked reluctant — they all did. It must be the heat, he thought. No one wants to work. Well, neither did he, but that was the way it was.

They approached the door, a large, carved oaken panel secured by a rusted padlock and hasp. There was no result from Lamar's key; he tugged at the lock, then took an adze from one of the men, lifted the heavy wrecking tool and brought the blunt end down on the lock. The sound of metal against metal was very loud. It took three blows to shatter it, and then the door swung open. It did not creak, as Lamar had expected; instead, it opened silently and slowly, revealing the shadowed foyer.

Lamar looked inside, then back at the men on the porch. They stood in a tight, silent group. "So what the hell is wrong with everyone?" he asked. "I've seen mules in quicksand move faster!" He looked at his nephew. "You planning on working like this all summer long?"

Randy looked back at him intently. "Don't you feel it?"

"Feel what? And what the hell are you whispering for?"

"This house."

"What about it?"

Randy glanced at the rest of the crew, then shrugged and said, "Well, this may sound silly, Uncle Lamar, but I don't think this house wants us here."

Lamar looked from Randy to the rest of them, all poised in uncomfortable stances, hands shoved into back pockets, heavy boots shuffling. But no one said anything further, and at last he had to ask, "What in hell does *that* mean?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was Jim Driffs, one of the hired loaders from Blessed Shoals, who answered nervously. "Well, Mr. Warren, there's been an awful lot of stories about this place." He swigged down the last bottle of warm Pepsi. "Lot of people lived here and died here, and there's those that say none of them people ever really left. That there's something in this house that keeps them here. Something evil. And if you tear the place down — it might not like it."

"You didn't seem too worried about all this when I hired you," Lamar said.

Jim Driffs shrugged. "I needed the money. And Greymare was a good forty miles away. Now I'm standing on the front porch, and I wonder how bad I need that money." He looked about at the others, somewhat embarrassed at his speech, and seemed relieved when it was obvious that many of them felt the same way.

Lamar almost made the mistake of laughing — but then he looked closer at each of them, and realized that the house really did scare them, all of them. Even George Colby, who usually had a head as level as a bulldozed lot, seemed nervous.

"Y'all wait here," he said, and walked back to the trucks. Stepping out into the sunlight, he blinked at the sudden heat and light. He hadn't realized just how cool it had been on the porch.

He got several six-battery flashlights, and when he approached the porch again it was with an odd reluctance, considering how hot the sun was. He handed the flashlights to Randy, George and the others. "Let's go," he said cheerfully, and stepped across the threshold.

The cool air inside raised gooseflesh on his arms. He wrinkled his nose at the musty odor, the smells of dead insects and rotting fabric. The foyer opened into a huge main room, of which shuttered windows and heavy curtains made a vast, dim cavern. Lamar flicked on his light, and the powerful beam cut the darkness. There was no furniture left, which made the room seem even more gigantic. A huge, cut-crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling. Lamar turned the light into corners and along the walls, checking to make sure no vagrant lay asleep in a pile of rags. He could hear the squeak and scurry of rats, and he suppressed a shudder. Dealing with vermin was part of the wrecking business, but still, he hated rats. He remembered once demolishing an entire block of tenements; as each building came down, the rats had fled to the next, until at last they were all hiding in the last structure to be blasted. The old brick walls had fairly hummed with the sound of hundreds of thousands of panicked rodents. He had had to go in to plant the charges...

He gulped a sour taste and let the light ripple up a wide, balustraded staircase that led to the second floor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Gonna flake that whole thing loose, if we have the time," he said, and the echoes of his voice made Randy and the others start. They had followed him in, as he knew they would — he was a good man to work for, and he inspired loyalty in his crew. They would not let him go in here alone. Lamar smiled as he looked at the hardwood floor, which had ornamental borders of teak. Against the far wall was a carved mahogany mantel framing a fireplace large enough to stand upright in, with a cast iron fireback. The house was a palace, no doubt of it. There was plenty of money in this room alone, and eighteen other rooms awaited his inspection.

He flashed the light back at Jim Driffs, who ducked as though struck at. "Some of you open these windows, let a little light and air in here! That should chase the spooks away!" He was immediately sorry he had added that — it sounded too contemptuous. Then he became angry at his regret as he watched them move reluctantly into the darkness, their flashlight beams shimmering off curtains of cobwebs. Was he going to have to mollycoddle the whole crew through this job?

He speared Randy and George with his light. "Come on, you two! Let's give this place the once-over."

To the left, a huge, linteled archway opened into the dining room. The dark walls gave off no reflection. From the ceiling hung an anachronism: a 1920's style ceiling fan with wooden blades, which the movers had somehow overlooked. Lamar trod on something that crackled; his light revealed the shed skin of a rattlesnake. "Watch your step," he said, and heard Randy gulp.

They continued into the kitchen, which had been a later addition to the mansion, replacing the outdoor kitchen of plantation days. A windowed rear door provided faint light. The gritty smell of decomposition came from a bloated dead rat under the double-basin sink. Lamar turned away to a door by the recessed pantry. As he reached for the glass knob, Randy said abruptly, "Don't open it!"

Lamar paused with his hand on the knob. "And why not?"

Randy looked sickly pale in the reflected brilliance of the flashlights. "It's probably..."

"Probably the cellar," George said. "Lots of rats, most likely."

Lamar glared at both of them. "I've about near had it with all of you," he said. "This ain't nothing more than an old house! Now we got to check out the cellar, same as everyplace else." He realized he was raising his voice because he was nervous himself; the feeling puzzled and angered him. There was nothing to be frightened of in Greymare House. Outside of the rats...

He released the knob. "All right. It don't matter what order we go through the place. Randy, you and I will try that staircase," and he pointed toward another half-open door, with a flight

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of steps leading upward. "George, get outside and set the trimming crew to marking the place."

"You don't have to tell me twice." George started out of the kitchen, then looked over his shoulder at them. "Be careful up there," he said, and left.

The steep, narrow staircase was most likely the slaves' route to the upper quarters of the house, Lamar thought. It was dusty and close, and once a rat skittered down the steps causing them both to jump. It opened onto a vast hallway on the second floor, one side of which had windows looking down on what had been an orchard. On the other side were four bedroom doors. Lamar stepped forward, then stopped in surprise.

"What is it?" Randy was still on the stairs.

"Chilly here," Lamar said. He waved one hand in the air as he advanced. After five steps, the feeling of cold air surrounding him lessened, and the humid summer warmth returned. He walked down to the other end of the hallway, but there was no further change in temperature. Then he turned and looked at Randy, who still stood on the last step, staring at him with wide eyes.

"Well, come on," Lamar said. "You scared of catching a cold now?"

Randy stepped into the hallway, then stopped. His eyes grew even wider, and he wrapped his arms about himself.

"It's not *that* cold," Lamar said impatiently.

"Yes, it is!"

Lamar could hear his nephew's teeth chattering. He stepped again into the chill area, which did not seem nearly as cold to him as it evidently did to Randy, took his nephew's arm and pulled the young man forward. "See? Nothing to be afraid of. Just a little draft. Hot as a turkey in the oven here, ain't it?"

Randy looked over his shoulder. "I'll be—" he did not finish the sentence. "It's a genuine cold spot."

"I don't need to be told it was cold."

"I mean it's a classic psychic phenomenon." Randy started to extend his hand into it, but did not. "I've read about them — they're a common occurrence in haunted houses."

Lamar sighed. "I can't believe that you, a college-educated boy, believes in ghosts." He was disappointed; he had admired Randy at least for his book learning.

"I didn't say I believe in ghosts, if you mean dead folks' spirits. But there's something wrong with this mansion, Uncle — and a lot of college-educated people would agree with me. I've talked to scientists at the university who say that ghosts are as good an explanation for the way the world works as anything else." Randy looked around him and shivered, though he was no longer in the cold spot.

"What, *scientists* believing in *spooks?*"

"Physicists," Randy said. "You'd be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

surprised at some of the things they believe in. Listen — let's go downstairs. We don't need to go through the rest of Greymare House, do we?"

"If you're doing a job," Lamar said, "you got to do it all the way, even if no one knows it but you. Come on, now." He started down the hall, and to his satisfaction saw Randy take a deep breath and follow him.

He entered the first bedroom, dimly lit by the hall windows. It was empty of furniture; Lamar looked with satisfaction at the ornate wainscoting and parquet floor pattern. In the second bedroom the walls were covered with peeling, patterned wallpaper. He glanced behind the door perfunctorily and almost missed the mirror. He swung the door almost shut and looked at it. It was full-length, the glass acid-etched with tracery, the frame brass, with finials and candlestick holders. It was a beautiful piece of work, and it was all his. He looked at his reflection in the gloom: a short, solid man with a fringe of gray hair and lines, broken veins in the nose. Despite the belly pushing over the belt, he felt he could say he was still in good shape.

He frowned and looked closer at his reflection. There was something slightly odd ... perhaps it was just the lack of light. The reflection of the room looked different. Lamar squinted. There was nothing in the room, nothing in the reflection, and yet....

The walls, that was it. The wallpaper was not faded and peeling, and cobwebs did not hang in the corners. Just the darkness? No, for he could see the pattern very clearly where the light from the door struck it.

Something moved in the shadows of the mirror.

He wheeled about, and at the same time he heard the scream. He aimed his flashlight as he would a gun, illuminating nothing but cobwebs; at the same time he pulled the door open and ran into the hallway, in time to see Randy staggering back from the open door of the last bedroom. The boy's face was plaster white, and one hand was out in front of him. He turned and stumbled into Lamar, who took him by the shoulders and held him up. Lamar's heart was pounding. "What? What was it?" he demanded.

"The — the bed ... blood...."

Lamar released him and started toward the last bedroom.

It took considerable effort on his part to do so. Randy's constant prattling about Greymare being haunted was obviously beginning to affect him. He could have sworn he saw something large and dark come toward him in the mirror....

He took a deep breath and stepped into the room.

It was empty, save for a large, brass-framed double bed. It had evidently been standing there for years; it was still covered with a patchwork quilt, dusty and faded now. But there was nothing unusual about it, except

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that, like the mirror, it should not be there. He could understand the movers overlooking the mirror, but how could they have passed over such a large piece of furniture?

Whatever the reason, it was his now. He walked around it, admiring the brass frame. There was no trace of blood, on the quilt or on the floor. A floorboard creaking behind him brought him around quickly. Randy stood there, staring at the bed.

"Well?" Lamar asked quietly.

"I — I don't—" he exhaled hard and tried again. "The floor was covered with blood. The bed was soaked in it. I never knew there could be so much blood. It was pouring off the quilt...."

"I don't see any blood."

"Neither do I — now."

Lamar turned away from him in disgust. This had gone too far. He had tried to be patient, but by God, enough was enough! He pointed his finger at his nephew. "If I hear one more word about this place being haunted—"

There was the sound of heavy footsteps running up the front stairs.

In spite of himself, Lamar jumped. Randy turned around with a gasp. Then George Colby came into the room, breathing hard and obviously frightened. "Thought I heard someone holler," he said.

Randy stood quite still. "You didn't," Lamar replied, and saw his nephew relax slightly. "Just a squeaking hinge. How are things downstairs?"

George looked uncomfortable. "Goin' slow, frankly. Things keep happening."

"Such as?"

"Such as a casement window banging shut on Frank Scully's head. Or Pettus burning his hands."

"How did *that* happen?"

Goerge shrugged. "He went into the fireplace to see how that back was mounted. Minute he touched it, he came out yellin' his hands were burned."

"That's impossible," Lamar said.

George shrugged again.

Lamar looked back at Randy. His nephew's face was expressionless. "Randy, go on back downstairs and see if you can help. George and I will go on up here."

He saw the relief in Randy's eyes, balanced by the reluctance in George's. Then Randy was out of the room and down the stairs, the echoes of his retreat fading slowly in the thick warm air.

"I'm tired of wetnursing him," Lamar said. "All the time talking about ghosts, seeing things. I know you won't panic, even if this place does get on your nerves." He saw George's jaw tighten, and knew the man would not back down now.

The inspection of the rest of the floor went by without incident. They hurried through the rooms, saying little, and Lamar had to admit that even he was beginning to be bothered by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Greymare House. He did not let any of this be noticed by George, however, who finally said, "I got to admire you, Lamar. I confess this place has me as nervous as a cat in a roomful of rocking chairs. But you don't feel it, do you?"

"I never was one to let my imagination run away with me," Lamar replied. "Never was scared of the dark when I was a kid — never understood why other kids were. My Grandpa used to tell us kids ghost stories, and my brothers and sisters would tie themselves into knots." He paused. "Just seemed silly to me. There's so much on this old world that can hurt you — why make up more things?"

"Knew a fella like that once," George said. "He'd spit in the Devil's eye on Halloween. He was like those folk what can't tell about music, what's the word?"

"Tone deaf?"

"Right, like that — 'cept he was tone deaf to the supernatural."

"That's me, too." But Lamar did not feel comfortable saying it. For the first time in his life, he was feeling uneasy without knowing the cause of it. The creaks and groans of the old house as they walked through it made him nervous and jumpy. And, though he would not admit it, he was glad to have George with him.

"Ain't nothing left to check 'cept the attic," George said finally. Lamar nodded, believing it for a moment, and then realized that George was wrong. There was still the cellar to be investigated.

His stomach tightened at the thought. It's the rats, he told himself. Only the rats.

The door to the attic was squat and wide, set at an incline against the stairs. It took both of their shoulders against it to open it.

Lamar was thinking about something Randy had said. He had an uneasy respect for science that he did not have for the supernatural. If scientists now believed in ghosts — well, that was very disturbing. After all, scientists had put men on the moon, you couldn't deny that, unless you were like old Abe Jeffries who still insisted it was all a hoax. But when you got right right down to it, what was more incredible — men walking on the moon, or ghosts walking the halls of Greymare?

It was not quite dark in the attic; some light and air came through the venting eaves and the shuttered windows. But it was dark enough. The attic was L-shaped, bending about the inclined doorway. Lamar flashed his light toward the large side of the room. He saw nothing except dust and webs, some scraps of cloth and paper. A hornets' nest hung near the ladder to the cupola. Lamar heard the whispering movements of the rats. It sounded, he suddenly thought, almost like someone or something chuckling.

It was then that George said, in a careful calm voice, "Randy ain't the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only one who's seeing things, Lamar."

Lamar turned and looked at him. George was staring at one of the rafters near the bend in the room. He was standing quite still, save that his hands were trembling.

Lamar saw nothing. "What is it, George?"

"You mean to say you don't see it?"

"Not a thing." And that was true. But he *felt* something; it was as though the nervousness he was feeling somehow seeped out of him and poisoned the air about him. It was a heavy, close sensation, and he felt his muscles tightening in response, his breathing growing more rapid. The scurrying of the rats increased, and the sound seemed more and more like dry, whispery laughter, the laughter of something old and evil.

"Describe it to me, George."

George said slowly, "I see a body hanging from that there beam, by a hemp rope. It's the body of a Confederate soldier, looking like it was hung yesterday. And underneath that, there's a Union soldier, lying in his blood. I swear I see those things as plain as I see you."

Lamar went forward and stopped beneath the beam. His heart was beating fast enough to make him dizzy, but he was determined to show none of his fear. "Here?" he asked. He flashed his light up at the rafter, saw nothing but wood.

"You — you're right beside 'em, Lamar. You're standing in that Yankee's blood. Please — don't go no closer. I'm awful scared that they're gonna move...."

Lamar still could not see anything, but now he most definitely felt something. His heart was pounding like a jackhammer, and the hair on his arms was standing up. The air seemed charged with electricity. He forced himself to breathe slowly.

He stepped around the corner to see what lay beyond it.

As he did, he felt as though he broke through a wall of spiderwebs — that insubstantial, yet at the same time very strong. The feeling of electricity in the air vanished. Behind him, he heard George say in amazement and relief, "They're gone! Just like soap bubbles!"

Lamar put a hand against the wall to keep himself upright. The release of tension left him feeling weak. "Well, then," he said, "come on and see what they were hiding."

George approached and looked around the corner. He still looked calm, but there was a jerkiness to his movements and a bright sheen of sweat on his brown temples.

Before them was a small rolltop desk.

"Do you suppose they was hiding it?" George whispered.

"I don't know what to think," Lamar replied, "except that we've been finding more booty in this house than in Cap'n Kidd's cave." He examined the lock on the desk. It was locked,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and he had no intention of forcing it open. "We'll figure a way into it later, maybe," he said. "Let's get it out of here."

It was not heavy. They carried it down to the second floor hallway. Lamar mopped his face with his handkerchief. "We'll leave it here for the crew to take out. Let's get downstairs. We got work to do."

It took all his willpower to walk slowly down the wide, curving staircase.

Most of the crew had assembled outside. There was little talk among them, Lamar noticed. Other items had been found, and assembled on the overgrown lawn: a wingback chair, a dry sink, a gate-leg table. Lamar looked at them in satisfaction. There were antique dealers who would pay a great deal for treasures like these. Outside the house, in the bright warm sun, he realized how foolish he had been to let the others' fears get to him. It was unfortunate about the bruise on Skully's head — unfortunate, but hardly the work of ghosts. The old counterweight ropes in the window had no doubt broken, that was all. As for Pettus' hands, that would be a bit harder to explain, but he was sure there was a reason. Fire ants, possibly.

"Well, time's wasting," he said. "Let's get started. We'll break down the attic first—"

He stopped abruptly, for he had once again remembered the cellar. He had not looked down there, nor had anyone else. Let it go, he told himself. After all, the tearing started at the top; it would be weeks before they had to concern themselves with the cellar. Let it go, or send someone else down. But as he looked at the faces of his crew, watching him, he knew none of them would do it. Could he ask one of them to go where he was reluctant to go?

His words to Randy came back to him: You got to do a job all the way, even if no one knows it but you.

This is foolish, he told himself angrily. It's only a cellar. There's nothing down there except a few old boxes, possibly some old furniture....

And the rats.

The thought made Lamar ill. Nevertheless, his voice was steady as he continued, "Start trimming down the attic, while I check out the cellar." He turned back toward the house, feeling some small amusement at the surprised and worried looks his announced intention had caused.

As he stepped back onto the porch, Randy called, "Uncle Lamar—!" and stopped, as though unable to finish.

Lamar looked back at him and said, "George'll get you started on a job." He looked at George, who was staring at him in disbelief and worry, and said with as much cheeriness as he could, "Be back in a minute." Then he was inside the house again, listening to his footsteps echo as he walked toward the kitchen.

When he opend the cellar door, he could not help recoiling a step from the sheer intensity of the darkness — it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was like a black curtain. There was also the damp, earthy smell of mold and rat dung. Lamar started down the steps, holding the flashlight out before him. The beam, more than enough for the darkness upstairs, seemed almost absorbed by the close cellar night.

There was nothing to be afraid of, he told himself. All right, so maybe there was something wrong with Greymare House — maybe it *was* haunted. Just because he had never seen a ghost did not mean there wasn't something to the idea. But he had heard somewhere that there was no record of ghosts having hurt people — the most they could do was appear and frighten. And perhaps they could not even do that to him, for he had not even seen what Randy and George saw—

The risers under the last step were loose — he tripped and almost fell on the slippery stone floor. One hand, flailing to regain his balance, ripped through the sticky gauze of a spiderweb above him. He ducked, feeling the back of his neck prickle with the expectation of something loathsome dropping down his shirt. He almost turned and bolted back up the stairs. Calm *down!* he told himself fiercely. He struck out with the flashlight beam against the darkness. He had never been afraid of the dark before in his life, but this darkness was different — he could almost feel it, wrapping about him, seeking to smother him.

He flashed the light around the cellar.

It was very large — much larger than he had expected. As the light swung about, he heard the scrabbling sound of rats running, could see the green gleam of their eyes. The smell of them, mixed with the other smells of decay and dampness, made him feel ill. It was not cool in the cellar, not even as cool as it had been on the porch. Instead, it was oddly warm, a humid, jungle warmth.

He could see the chewed remnants of cardboard boxes and old newspapers, shredded by rat teeth and claws to make nests. There were a lot of nests. Somehow, he could never manage to catch the rats in the light longer than momentarily. But he could see enough to know that they were big.

Lamar walked out into the cellar, turned and shone the light under the steps. Nothing there but webs; he saw one huge black widow spider frozen by the beam, the hourglass like a drop of blood. He backed away, his back still hunched, though the joists were far over his head. He turned around again, panning the light, causing the rats to jump and burrow into their nests in an attempt to escape it. God, he thought, how the scratch and patter of all those claws did sound like dry, sinister laughter.

He turned back toward the stairs. There was nothing down here worth having. But, as much as he wanted to leave the cellar, he hestitated. There was something about the floor....

Lamar shone the beam over the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

floor again. The pool of light stopped on a large square that was a different shade of black. It was a trap door, old and moldy, with a ring handle near one end. Greymare House had a subcellar.

Lamar stared at it, not breathing, thinking: I've got to check it out, too.

He shook his head, feeling gooseflesh alive all over him. I can always say I didn't see it, he told himself. But instead of retreating, he approached the trapdoor with stiff, numb legs until he stood over it, looking down at it, the moldy wood shining in the light.

The rats were quiet now, he realized. As though they were waiting. Not one moved, but he could still hear the laughter, papery and evil and coming closer...

The trap door moved.

He screamed, and suddenly the cellar was alive with rats, rushing everywhere, startled by his scream; he kicked them and trod upon them as he ran toward the stairs. He tripped on the loose step, falling; the flashlight slipped from his fingers, hit the floor and the darkness was complete about him, suffocating him as he went up the steps on his hands and knees, feeling rats running over him, the sound of them deafening. He crawled for a lifetime, driving splinters into his fingers and knees, until suddenly he was lying on the tiled kitchen floor and kicking shut the cellar door.

He lay there for a moment, sobbing and shuddering. Then he stood, leaning against the wooden counter until his breathing returned to normal. Then he yanked open the back door and walked out into the hot afternoon sunlight.

He stood near the rusting husk of a bell that had once been used to summon slaves from the fields, and looked at the house. It looked no less stately and solid from the back. Lamar looked at it, let his eyes travel up to the dormered attic windows and the cupola. He could hear faint sounds from within as the crew went about stripping the walls of panelling.

For the first time in his life, he had been terrified by his own imagination. It could not be anything else, he told himself. There could not possibly be anything alive in that subcellar.

Nevertheless, he swore he would not see that cellar again until the house above had been ripped away and the sun allowed to burn out the filth and mold.

He stared at the house, feeling none of the admiration and regret he had when he first saw it. All that had changed, now. He was going to enjoy this job.

"I'm gonna bring you down," he said to Greymare House.

The trimming crew started on the attic and second floor, and soon the sultry afternoon air was full of the sounds of nails shrieking loose from wood and chisels stabbing into plaster. Lamar

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looked in satisfaction at the amount of salvage that began to come out of the house. Greymare was a treasure trove of woodwork alone: the carved walnut window casings, the redwood ceiling beams and corbels, the mahogany railings ... all this would resale at a fine price. He had to make a good profit at this job, he thought grimly; otherwise, the Warren Wrecking Company would not last much longer. He could not afford for things to go wrong.

But things did go wrong.

One of the first jobs was flaking loose the cupola from the roof and lowering it with the crane. This was Alice's job. She sat in the worn green leather chair in the open cab, her grinning face protected by a visored helmet, and worked the hoist and swing levers with a delicate touch. The heavy ball and hook at the end of the cable came within reach of the crew men on the roof, and was secured to the ropes woven around the cupola. Lamar listened to the heavy chugging of the diesel engine as the cupola lifted free of the roof, hovered a moment and then swung slowly away from the roof as the crane house turned. He watched Alice fondly. He had often claimed she could lift a baby from a carriage without waking it. Which is why he was so shocked to see the boom suddenly jerk slightly, and the dangling cupola suddenly snap free of its ropes and plummet downward. It was a large cupola, almost big enough for a man to stand upright in, with an iron weathervane tipped with an arrow. The men in the flatbed truck beneath it, who had been waiting to guide the cupola to its resting place on sawhorses, stood frozen in disbelief; then they leaped over the sides of the truck as the cupola crashed into it, shattering a chair and table set that had already been roped into place.

Lamar and the rest of the crew ran to the truck. The cupola and the majority of the furniture on the truck had been smashed to kindling, though thankfully no one had been hurt. Lamar felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to see Alice, her square face pale with shock and disbelief.

"I swear I don't know how it happened, Lamar."

"It's okay," he said. She was blinking back tears; he held her wide shoulders soothingly, attempting to calm her. "It's okay. You've gone for nine years without an accident — you're still 'way ahead of the game." She looked at him gratefully. He turned back to look at the damage done and saw George Colby standing nearby, looking at him. The tall man's face was noncommittal, but for some reason Lamar felt quick rage rise up within him. "What the hell you staring at, George? Ain't we lost enough time and money? C'mon, let's get back to work!"

George merely nodded without comment, and turned and walked briskly back toward the house. But Lamar could see him slow for a moment as he crossed the threshold, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

though reluctant to enter.

He turned away from the others, who were looking at him in surprise at his outburst. It was unlike him, he knew. Well, Christ, if Alice was allowed an accident, he was certainly allowed to get upset over it.

He looked back at the house, and muttered a curse.

The work continued. Shingles fell from the roof like dirty brown leaves. Tied wood joints were cut, and the bargeboard came down. By the time the long slow summer evening was complete, a large hole in the roof had been opened and the attic stripped bare. One man had been wasp-stung from the nest there, and another had cut his arm on the flange of a metal vent, but such minor injuries accompanied every job. There was nothing, really, to indicate anything out of the ordinary was going on, Lamar told everyone repeatedly. Yet, as the sun sank behind the trees and dark, knifelike shadows slid over the grounds, the crew made haste to vacate Greymare House. They assembled around the trucks, silent and pensive for the most part. A few among them professed to sense nothing wrong with the house, but they did not voice their opinions very loudly.

Lamar did not know what he could say to the crew to cheer them up. For the first time since he had started this company, he felt unable to talk to his employees. It was all foolishness, he told himself irritably; and the worst of it was, he was being affected by it. He flushed at the thought of his behavior in the cellar, though no one knew about it but him. There could not be anything down there. This house was simply a job, like any other.

Still, as the truck pulled away from the grounds and he looked back at the house, limned in the red sunset, he could not help shuddering. If ever a house should be haunted, Lamar thought, Greymare House was it.

They arrived early the next morning, and the work continued. Forklifts carried wood and debris to the loaders, wrenches loosened bolts, screwdrivers removed screws and hinge pins. While work proceeded on the main house, Lamar instructed Bill Antoine to dozer down the mounds of rotting wood and kudzu that had once been the rebuilt slaves' cabins.

The yellow scoop dozer rolled down toward the old buildings, its wide tires crushing elephant's-ear plants and Judas vine, the engine firing slowly, sending puffs of blue smoke from the upright exhaust. Antoine lowered the blade, and the wide curved wall of metal hit the gray wood, pushed it forward with hardly a change in the engine's sound, grinding it into the red dirt like a lawnmower running over an ant hill. Lamar, watching, could smell the strong sweet smell of crushed plants mingling with diesel smoke. He felt a fierce satisfaction as the first

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

building collapsed. See that, house? he thought, amused at his feelings but nevertheless enjoying them. See that? You're next.

The dozer struck the second building. A yellow explosion of sunflower birds scattered from beneath the eaves as their home was destroyed. Lamar turned away toward the house, intending to go inside and get out of the heat. He stopped at the sight of Randy, standing near a skiploader with Jim Driffs and several other men. Randy was talking; the others were listening and nodding.

Lamar started toward them; at that moment, nephew or not, he was ready to fire Randy. Why prolong a bad situation? The boy was obviously not taking his work seriously. Let him go back to college and his crazy professors.

But he had not taken three steps when he heard a scream from behind him, coming just after the crash of the dozer into another building. Lamar spun around, shocked, and saw Antoine leap down from the dozer, tearing his helmet off, to stand staring in horror at the structure he had just brought down.

Lamar ran back to him, puffing in the humid heat. He reached into the open cab of the dozer and shut off the motor. In the loud, throbbing silence that followed, he could hear Antoine's rasping breaths, verging on sobs, as he stood there with his face hidden in his hands. "What is it, Bill?" he asked. "What's happened?"

Antoine's voice was muffled behind his hands; his fingers were digging into his forehead, the nails drawing blood. His body rocked as the words came out. "I didn't know anybody was in there, Lamar, honest to God I didn't — oh, God, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, that poor little girl...."

Lamar looked down at the crushed and oozing tangle of plants and wood. There was no sign of a body in the wreckage. A shadow fell across the scene, and he looked up to see George. Remembering what had happened in the attic, he pointed to the ground beneath the blade and asked, "See anything?" dreading the answer.

George shook his head.

Lamar sighed in relief. "It's okay. Bill." He tried gently to pull the man's hands from his face.

"No — don't make me — I don't want to see her—"

"Ain't nothing to see. Look."

Antoine's hands crept slowly down his face. He looked, and blood followed the lines on his forehead as his eyes went wide. "Oh, thank the Lord!"

"Tell me what you saw."

"It was a young black girl — no more'n a child — the—" he shuddered. "—the blade had took off the top of her head — her eyes still open—" he covered his own eyes again.

Lamar looked down at the crushed cabin again. Then he said to George, "Take care of him," turned and walked away. The members of the crew that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had gathered parted to let him through. "Keep working," he said in a low voice, and slowly, reluctantly, they returned to their jobs.

During the rest of the day minor accidents plagued them. A loader, his arms full of panelling, tripped over a bootscraper outside the back door and cut his shin. The engines on the machinery would sputter and die for no reason. A trimmer was bitten by a rat and had to be rushed to the Blessed Shoals Hospital.

Lamar told himself that such misfortunes could happen on any job. But he could not explain the hallucinations more and more members of his crew were having, or the feeling of tension in the air. A worker would rip a section of wainscoting from a wall and suddenly stop in a cold sweat and stare over his shoulder. Lights were strung everywhere, banishing the darkness, and by unspoken agreement no one went into any of the rooms alone.

Riding back along the winding, twisted roads, hemmed in by darkness, Lamar stared at the black and white glare of the headlights on the road. Only the second day, he thought, and already they were behind schedule.

There were more ways than one to demolish a house. He remembered the tenement building, and the living carpet of rats he had crossed to plant the dynamite that had brought the building down. He looked out the side window, into the darkness, and saw the brief glimmer of foxfire in the swamp. He shivered.

The next day, most of the loaders Lamar had hired locally did not return. "There ain't much we can do about it," George told him. "We won't be able to get anybody from that town to help tear this place now."

"We'll have to just get on as best we can," Lamar said. The walkout had come as a shock to him. But they had to keep going; the company's future depended on their completing this job.

This day went no better. One of the small bobcat dozers punctured a dump loader's tire with the corner of its sharp blade as the driver was swinging around. A large section of masonry simply fell from one of the gables, narrowly missing several men. The crew worked with the grim, leaden determination of convicts on a road gang.

At noon, Lamar was sitting under a large catfaced pine, eating a bologna sandwich. He sat alone. He noticed Randy and Jim Driffs — who, oddly, had not quit with the others — bending over the rolltop desk in the back of the flatbed. Lamar stood and walked quickly to the truck. He had spoken little to his nephew since the episode in the bedroom, but he had not been happy with Randy. The boy had refused to enter the house again, working instead outside on the cleanup crew. He had continued to talk to others, asking them what they thought of the house and of the strange things that had happened. Lamar felt he had bent over

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

backwards to give Randy a chance to come around. He could not continue to let the boy stir up more anxiety; this job was causing him too much trouble as it was.

He also did not want him damaging the few pieces of furniture left intact, and so he leaned over the side of the truck. He saw Jim Driffs probing the desk's lock with a wire; before he could say anything there was a *click!* and Jim slid the top up. Lamar swung himself up into the truck with a grunt. Randy and Jim looked up in surprise, but Lamar's curiosity had made him forget his anger. They investigated the contents of desk together.

The many shelves and drawers were crammed with the usual heterogenous collection that accumulates in desks: a brass candlestick with the melted remnant of a candle in it; a plate with a blue Currier and Ives design; several soiled and faded antimacassars. There were also a great many yellowed papers and envelopes — and a diary.

All three of them reached for it — Randy seized it and opened it. Lamar covered the pages with his hand. "I'll read it," he said, surprised by the surliness in his voice.

Randy looked at him levelly for a moment, then handed the diary to him without comment. Lamar glared at the pages in confusion for a moment before he realized what was wrong. He felt heat creep up the back of his neck.

"What is it?" he growled.

"French."

Lamar gave the book back to him. Randy looked at the first page.

"It belonged to a woman named Danielle Avinaign ... the first entry is dated October 15th, 1975. She must have been the last tenant ... 'How happy Arnaud and I shall be here! This is a house much like the ones of which my mother told me; solid and spacious, with a depth and charm we could find nowhere in New Orleans' highly touted architecture. The movers have finally finished, and we are starting now to make sense of the great chaos they have left us. Arnaud says we will have to make do by ourselves for a time until proper servants can be found; this area is, after all, hardly the height of civilization! Nevertheless, it is what we have chosen for our remaining years; a simple and, God provide, peaceful existence—' " Randy frowned. "The page is torn slightly here, and inkstained — I think something startled her and she slashed the paper with the pen ... uh-huh, listen: 'I must tell Arnaud to purchase some traps immediately. There are rats here.' " He stopped.

"That all?" Jim Driffs asked.

"All for that day." Randy turned over several pages.

"Sounds like she's trying to make the best of bad situation," Lamar said, interested enough to forget his anger.

Randy glanced at him, then at the house behind them. "Doesn't it." He began to read again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

" 'The local inhabitants — in particular, one Eudora Hines, a local termagant with seemingly not a good word to say for anyone — have gone to great effort to acquaint me with the sordid history of Greymare. I have learned much that Arnaud did not tell me, though my sources can hardly be called reliable. If they are to be believed, Greymare is a veritable House of Usher. Since its antibellum origins, it has evidently been the site of constant murder and rapine. A few of the less disgusting events, as recounted to me by the salacious Madame Hines:

'The house was built by Claiborne Greymare in the late 1700's as a retreat for his ailing wife. She complained constantly of being cold, even in the summer, and she hated the house. Evidently she went quite mad, for she at last immolated herself in the downstairs fireplace. Greymare sold the house to William Jared, a cotton baron and from all accounts a devil in human form. He beat and tortured his slaves; Eudora has described how a slave was tied to what she terms "That catfaced pine out front," and whipped until he chewed the bark away in his pain. They say it has never grown back. This continued until the Civil War, whereupon the slaves rose up in revolt and literally hacked Jared to pieces while he slept, soaking his bed in blood—' " Randy stopped with a sudden gasp. "The bed!"

Lamar knew what he meant. "Now wait," he began. "That couldn't be the same bed—"

"Why couldn't it? I saw the blood, Uncle Lamar!"

"I don't think you better read any more." Lamar reached for the diary. Randy backed out of reach and continued reading rapidly.

" '—Evidently Greymore drew crimes of passion to it. During the war a young man in the Confederate Army stalked his brother, a Union soldier, through the house, killed him and then hanged himself—' "

"George Colby saw them in the attic!" Jim Driffs shouted.

Lamar was aware of others in the crew gathering around and listening to Randy's rising voice. He felt panic beginning within him — this could cause them all to walk out. "I said give me that!" he snapped, grabbing the diary from Randy's hands. Randy stumbled backward, sprawled over the desk and into a clutter of furniture and lumber.

The silence that followed was quite intense. Lamar and Randy looked at each other in shock. Finally, "I'm sorry, Randy," Lamar said. He leaned forward, offering a hand to his nephew. "This job's been considerable strain to me—"

Randy ignored Lamar's hand as he got to his feet. "Uncle," he said quietly, "What's a catfaced tree?"

Lamar did not answer him. He did not seem to be able to organize his thoughts.

Jim said slowly, "It's what they call a scar on a tree that's healed around. Like that pine yonder," and he pointed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the tree under which Lamar had been sitting.

"That's a big tree," Randy said. "It's probably over a hundred years old."

He and Jim looked at each other. Then they both leaped from the truck bed and ran toward the tree, followed by several others who had been listening.

Lamar watched them helplessly. If only he knew the right things to say, he thought; the words that would bring them all to their senses, that would stop this increasing madness....

"There!" Randy shouted, pointing at a spot on the tree trunk. "There it is!"

Lamar stared with the rest of them. He could see it quite clearly across the hot green distance: a white wound on the dark body of the tree, glistening with fresh sap.

The next day, half of the crew did not show up for work. George Colby arrived quite late. When Lamar saw him, he began to shout. "Goddamn them! They know this is a make-or-break job for us! How could they—"

"They could real easy," George said. "It ain't that easy for me, Lamar — but I got to do it anyway. I just come to tell you I won't be on this job no more."

Lamar stared at George. It was late afternoon, and they stood by Alice's crane, watching the few crew members left go about the day's work. "George," Lamar said slowly, "You're my right-hand man. You're co-owner of this here company. You — you were never one to lose your common sense, George. You've always had nerve. Remember that burnt job we had over in Beatriceville? We were in there with the scoop when half that burnt-out roof started falling."

"I remember."

"You never turned a hair," Lamar went on, his voice quietly desperate. "You just raised that blade over us like an umbrella. You saved both of us. Now you want to ruin me, George?"

"It won't work, Lamar," George said. "You got to remember — you don't feel what most of us feel in this house. Everytime a man puts a bar to it, seems like it cries out in pain — pain and hatred. You can't feel that. But those men that quit felt it. And I feel it. We stayed as long as we did because of you. But we can't stay no longer. Don't try to make us. Please. You don't know how it feels."

Lamar thought of the cellar; the thick warm darkness, and the cold gleam of the rats' eyes. The hell I don't feel it, he thought angrily. I'm as scared as you all are. But I've got a job to do. Aloud he said, "Go on then, if that's all the spine you have. But we ain't no union company. Don't think you can get your jobs back."

George looked at him with great sadness. "This ain't at all like you, Lamar. I don't know why you're being

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this way — but it don't change anything. We can't stay here! I'm telling you that house is *alive*, and it's fighting for its life! I'm telling the crew to pull out!"

"You 'll put this company underground if you do!" Lamar grabbed George by his shoulders. "You're going to ruin us!"

"If I don't," George said, "Greymare House will!" He pulled free and started toward the house.

Lamar looked after him, seeing through a red filter of fury. They *had* to finish tearing this house! He could not let anything stop him — not the house, not the rats, and not George.

He started to run after him, but at that moment he heard a car pull onto the grounds behind him. He turned to see Randy's Volkswagen come to a stop. His nephew got out and ran toward him, the diary clutched in one hand. His face was quite pale, but full of determination.

"I read it," he said. "The whole thing, last night." He opened the book. "Listen to this: 'I am now convinced that Greymare House is the haven of some hostile, preternatural force, a malignancy that brings out and thrives upon the worst in people. It dwells within the cellar, or in the ground beneath Greymare and drives people to their deaths. But then — ultimate horror! — *it does not let them die.* Their spirits remain, tied to the halls and rooms of Greymare. I know this is true. I have seen in the empty cabins slaves William Jared tortured, such as the truncated specter of a little girl. I have seen his bloodied bed. In the mirror on my bedroom wall I have seen reflected things of which I cannot write.' " Randy turned the pages. "This is the last entry: 'It has taken Arnaud; driven him mad with horror. He has gone to it. The house will not let us leave. The doors close and lock themselves; the shutters cannot be forced. As I write this, the sun is setting. So far I have been able to keep my sanity, but its power is greater at night.

'The sun is almost down. I write this in the attic, as far away from the evil locus as possible. I can hear Arnaud's mad laughter far below. I can see the slain forms of the brothers, one lying in his blood, the other twisting slowly above him. And now the rats are appearing in the dusk ... they seem quite fearless....' "

Randy shut the diary with a snap. "That's all. Don't you see, Uncle? That spirit, or force, or whatever it is, is still there!"

Lamar looked at Randy, but could not see him clearly; there seemed to be a roaring in his ears, a soundless pounding that made his head ache. "It's impossible," he said slowly. "You're making it up. Can't nobody here but you read it—"

Before Randy could reply, they heard shouting from within Greymare House.

Lamar turned and ran toward the house. Randy hesitated a moment,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then followed. Lamar pounded up the steps colliding with men on their way out, running, clawing, fighting with each other to get through the door. Lamar pushed and shoved against them, at last tumbling into the dark interior.

Randy followed him in. George Colby was the only one still there. He stood staring into the fireplace. Lamar looked; at first he saw nothing. He stared, shaking with intensity, feeling it somehow very important that he see what they had seen.

Gradually, the room seemed to fill with flickering orange light. The huge stone fireplace became ablaze with flame; he could hear the crackling of pine knots and smell the smoke. And in the midst of the flames stood a woman. She had evidently just stepped into the fire, for her nightgown was still burning, her hair just beginning to ignite. As Lamar watched, rooted with horror, he saw her turn and stare at him; her blue eyes, at first filled with the calm of madness, suddenly widened as the agony brought realization. She threw back her head and screamed, as her skin began to blacken and shrivel....

And then the scene seemed to waver, to ripple like disturbed water, and was gone. The fireplace stood empty and cold.

George turned to Lamar. "You saw that," he said quite calmly.

Lamar slowly nodded.

George turned and walked out the door. Outside was the sound of engines turning over. The men had piled into the old Ford vans and the flatbed. Through the front door he could see them driving away at breakneck speed.

Randy grabbed his arm. "Uncle, we've got to get out of here!"

Lamar blinked. There were quite a few rats in the shadows he noticed — all still, all watching. He shook Randy's hand away and turned to face him. "This is your fault," he said thickly. "All of it. You turned my crew against me...." He swung the back of his fist at Randy, felt his knuckles strike the boy's cheekbone, splitting the skin. Randy fell away from him and sprawled on the floor. He scrambled to his knees and ran, away from Lamar and the front door, toward the arch that led to the dining room.

Lamar looked blankly at his smarting hand, then after his nephew. The blow he had struck Randy seemed to have struck him as well, shocking him out of his rage. "Randy," he shouted. "Are you all right?" He ran after him.

He came through the archway and stopped. Randy stood in the middle of the dark, empty room, eyes wide and face bloodless, staring at the floor in front of him. Lamar heard the dry, sinister rattle even before he saw the snake. It was a huge diamondback, coiled a foot from Randy. Randy stood very still.

"Easy," Lamar whispered. "Take it easy," as he looked about for something to use as a weapon. There was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nothing. Then, suddenly, his eyes caught a flicker of motion in the darkness above Randy. Lamar stared upward, unable to believe what he saw.

The ceiling fan was beginning to turn.

There was no electricity to power it, yet the fan was spinning; slowly at first, then faster. Randy looked up as the musty air breathed over him. The fan was spinning quite fast now, faster than it had been designed for. Lamar could feel the floor beginning to vibrate, could hear the high, keen whine of the wooden blades cutting the air. The fan was beginning to shake, but still it spun, faster and faster, producing a propwash that tore at their hair and clothes. Randy stood beneath it, staring alternately at it and the coiled rattlesnake. He closed his eyes and began to sob. A fine powder of ceiling plaster frosted the air....

"No!" Lamar screamed, as the fan tore loose from the ceiling and hurtled downward. He hid his face behind his arms, but could not avoid hearing Randy's scream, or the hideous sound that cut it off. He felt a wet mist on his arms as he hurled himself backwards, running across the floor under the watchful gaze of the rats.

He burst from the house and ran toward the abandoned heavy equipment. He sagged to his knees against the dump loader and was sick.

Then he stood, slowly, and stared back at Greymare House.

It stood, quiet, substantial and ominous against the afternoon sun. Most of the roof was gone, and part of the upper walls, but it had not been defeated. Lamar stared at it for a long time, feeling his horror and sorrow subside slowly, leaving nothing but icy determination.

He was alone. The crew had left, and Randy ... Randy was dead. It was him against the house, now.

He would have to bring it down alone.

Lamar turned and climbed into one of the transport trucks. From a locked cabinet he brought forth an extra heavy pair of coveralls; gloves and a face visor. Then he lifted out a stout wooden box, and a wooden chisel and mallet. He stood the box on one end, and carefully tapped the cover loose. Within were the long, brick-red cylinders, packed in sawdust. He had packed the box two days before, telling no one. I could have lost my license for improper transportation of explosives, he thought, and let go a single note of dry laughter.

He worked slowly and carefully, refusing to let himself think about anything but the job. He snapped blasting caps onto each stick of dynamite, attached the black and red wires to each cap. He wired them in parallel, five to a set, and each set to a small radio receiver unit. Then he donned the coveralls, gloves and visor, gathered up the dynamite and turned toward the house again.

The sun was near the horizon, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it had not yet set. The diary had said Greymare's power was weaker by day. And perhaps it would be weaker still after the effort it had just expended. In any event, he would have to take the chance.

Lamar took a deep breath, and walked toward the house.

The door had swung shut, and would not open until he used a crowbar on it. He went inside.

It was as he had feared: the rats were there, everywhere, covering the floor in a dirty flood, the sound of their restless prowling filling the room, sounding so much like laughter....

Lamar swallowed bile and forced himself across the floor toward the fireplace, one of the structural strong points of the house. The rats tore at his heavy boots, scrabbled up his legs, slashing at his two pairs of coveralls with teeth and claws. He clubbed them off with the crowbar. He put one of the sets of dynamite on the mantel, where the rats could not reach it, then turned and fought his way toward the kitchen, not looking at Randy's body in the dining room. He left another of the sets on the counter. As he did, a creaking sound swung him around, and what he saw tore a scream from his throat. He turned and clawed his way up the back stairs against the tide of rats. The cellar door was opening....

He ran, planting the rest of the dynamite against the supporting walls upstairs. The rooms and corridors were like a maze; they seemed to twist and turn back on themselves, nightmarishly, as he searched for the front staircase. And everywhere were the rats, tearing at him, biting and clawing. But even that was not the worst of it, for through the sound of the rats he could hear laughter, coming closer, and he knew that something was following him, something that had come from the cellar to drag him back to it, something dark in the darkness of the corridors, grinning, and gaining on him.

Lamar's clothes and gloves were ripped to shreds now, and he had lost his visor. A rat leaped at him, sinking its teeth into his arm — he staggered back, and suddenly there was the staircase. He fell down it, dropping the crowbar, the bodies of rats cushioning his fall. He managed somehow to get to his feet. As he ran across the floor he glimpsed the huge chandelier above him swaying — he dodged to one side as it fell, crashing to the floor and spraying him with crystalline fragments. The front door was closing; Lamar hurled himself forward, twisting through the narrow opening. Then he was outside, stumbling across the grass in the bloody evening light.

Behind him, he heard the door open again.

Lamar did not look back. He ran toward the truck where he had left the detonator. Behind him something was coming, something even more horrible than the formless terror his mind pictured. It was close upon him, he knew,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

perhaps already reaching for him as he seized the detonator and, knowing he was still too close to the house, jammed both thumbs onto the button.

Then a huge, slamming sound, more felt than heard lifted and hurled him. Lamar felt himself turn completely over once. He did not feel himself hit, or hear the echoes of the explosion rumble away into the pattering rain of debris, and finally into absolute silence.

The last thing Lamar heard as he lost consciousness was the laughter.

When Lamar woke, it was night.

His awakening took a long time. He was semiconscious several times, feeling dimly the night breeze on his face and body, before sinking once more into blackness. At last he became fully conscious. One of the first things he noticed was the acrid smell of cordite. He tried to open his eyes, could only open one — the other seemed crusted over. He looked at a strange, upside-down scene: the blasted ruins of Greymare House.

The moon, just past full, illuminated everything in stark black and white. He had placed the charges well, Lamar thought, feeling absurdly proud of himself. Most of the house had been blown apart. The fireplace and chimney, the spine of the structure, had been broken, and the other blasts had disintegrated the already-weakened upstairs. One wall had collapsed completely, and only fragments of the other three stood. The first floor had caved in. Everywhere were scorched and twisted pieces of wood and metal, fragmented beams, shattered glass and tile. The front window had been blown out on one of the trucks, but he could see no other damage to the equipment.

Lamar was lying upside down in the bank of kudzu where he had been thrown by the explosion. Surprisingly, he did not feel much pain — not until he moved. Then a burst of agony from his left arm told him that it was probably broken. He was bleeding from cuts caused by the blast and the crashing chandelier, but none of them seemed too serious. All in all, he realized, he had been extraordinarily lucky. The plant wall had cushioned his fall and saved him from major injuries.

His movement, slight as it was, overbalanced him, and he slid slowly downward and toppled over, clenching his teeth against the pain as his arm was twisted. He grabbed a broken balustrade from the staircase that lay nearby and used it as a cane to pull himself to his feet. He put his hand to his eye to explore the damage, and took it away again quickly; most of the eye seemed to be gone. He felt faint and sick from his injuries, and he did not know how far he could walk. But he was alive. He was alive, and Greymare House was dead.

The night was very quiet, he thought. Then he realized that he had been deafened by the explosion. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looked up at the stars — his neck crackled painfully, but he kept his head up. I did it, he thought. I brought Greymare down.

He looked at the ruins again, and saw the rats.

There were not nearly as many as there had been. They were crawling about the ruins, and paid no attention to him as he limped painfully toward the truck. They were not interested in him, now that Greymare and its evil had been destroyed.

It would not be a comfortable ride back to Blessed Shoals — he did not know how he would shift gears with a broken arm. But he would manage somehow. He had already been through the worst, he told himself, as he made his slow way past Alice's crane.

The crane moved.

Lamar stopped, turned his head and stared at the crane. No, he said to himself. No. Please, no.

But as he watched, it moved again.

There was no mistaking it; the housing moved slightly, left, then right, like an animal sniffing. The boom lowered slightly, and the steel cables tightened.

Then it began to roll toward him.

Lamar backed up slowly, not thinking at all, simply watching. He could see the crane quite clearly in the moonlight, could see the deep, scarlike paths the treads were leaving in the ground, could see the empty cab, where no one was riding, no one pulling the hoist lever back. And yet the drum was slowly turning, the cable winding, and the clam shell bucket that had been used to pick up salvage was slowly rising, and opening.

The silence was the worst part of it. His deafness prevented him from hearing the creakings of the boom and cables, the clacking roll of the treads. But he knew that the engine was not running — he might not have heard the starter engine crank, but the heavy pounding of the diesel was a subsonic, gutwrenching sound that shook the ground. No, the motor was off — but the crane was moving.

It's not fair, he thought.

He stepped backwards again and stumbled, then slid down an embankment of loose earth, tumbling, crying out in agony.

He opened his one eye and realized he was in the cellar.

It had survived the dynamite quite well. Over half of the floor sagged, making a brooding cave. The rest was bathed in moonlight, the jointed stone a cold silver over which rats flickered like shadows. Lamar stood, staring at the center of the floor.

The trap door was open.

Of course, he thought quite calmly. It's stronger at night.

A movement overhead made him look up. The crane boom was swinging over him — and the bucket was dropping!

Lamar scrabbled to one side, feeling the vibration as the heavy steel

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bucket slammed into the stone beside him. He stared at it as it rose again, the welded bolts covered with dirt, the cables drawing open the serrated halves like giant jaws.

He half-ran, half-limped into the darkness beneath the first floor. A moment later the broken floor beams shook as the bucket dropped on top of them. Lamar hid under his good arm as small pieces of wood and plaster rained down on him.

The bucket struck again. The floor sagged. It was coming apart. He knew he could not remain under it.

He ran out, holding his broken arm in his good hand, trying to use his feeble momentum to carry him up the embankment. It was useless; he slid back down.

The bucket hit the stone beside him again. Lamar backed away, felt nothing under one foot — and then he was falling....

He did not fall far. The impact knocked him breathless nonetheless. He tried to stand and could not.

He was in darkness, lying on a damp dirt floor. He looked up — the trap door was well out of reach.

He thought longingly of how the eventual sunrise would burn out the evil that had dwelt so long beneath Greymare. But it would not come in time for him.

Though he was deaf, he could still somehow hear the dry, crackling laughter — or was it the scrabbling of the rats? Something touched his ankle, began to creep up his leg.

Oh please, he thought; please — let it be a rat.

MERCURY PRESS, Inc., Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753
Please send _____ copies of THE BEST FROM FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, 24th Series, edited by Edward L. Ferman, limited hardcover edition signed by the editor. I enclose $14.95 per copy, which includes postage and handling.

NAME _____

STREET _____

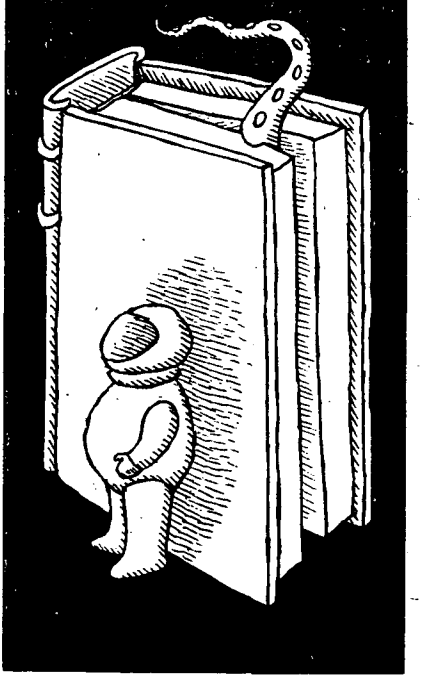
CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

SEE AD ON INSIDE FRONT COVER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books

ALGIS BUDRYS



Battlefield Earth, L. Ron Hubbard, St. Martin's, $24.

2010: Odyssey Two, Arthur C. Clarke, Del Rey, $14.95

Foundation's Edge, Isaac Asimov, Doubleday, $14.95.

There are two kinds of story ideas, just as there are the two kinds of people. The kinds of people are the kind who divide everything into two categories and the kind who don't. The story ideas are the "open" and the "closed."

A "closed" idea is any idea which can be created by beginning with a distinct character and a clearly defined set of lesser characters, finding *the* setting in which that principal character will shine best, and handing him or her *the* problem which is the most interesting of all possible problems that might occur to that character in that best setting. Now, a closed idea may occur spontaneously to a writer, it may begin with the problem and develop its setting and characters, it may begin with the setting, it may fly in through the transom. But the effect on the reader — and usually on the writer — is of an attempt to write a definitive fictional crystallization of some universal truth. *Moby Dick*, I think, is a closed book, as are *A Case of Conscience*, *Odd John*, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, *The Demolished Man*, and, as a rough rule of thumb, any other book to which it is not *necessary* to write a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sequel.* Which is not to say that the modern market might not produce three or a dozen additional volumes somehow latched onto the original.

Now, here is an "open" idea:

Martian landing-parties passed through a time warp enroute to taking over Earth. Consequently, we are their descendents.

On an open idea, any number of plots might be hung. For example, there is the story containing the aging archeologist come to the lost jungle city, the gathering cloud of aggressive/defensive superstitious natives, the secret chamber with its grotesque carvings and trick door, the devil-may-care bush pilot, and the archeologist's daughter.

For another example, there is the time-eaten museum found in the wastes of eroded Mars by the first Terrestrial explorer. From the mosaic mural beyond the display cases, a breathtakingly beautiful woman gazes across the sere millennia into the love-struck eyes of the sensitive young man from Earth. Grotesque skeletal remains lie in the cases. Finally, the explorer finds a Rosetta stone and deciphers the labels. "Earthpeople," they read.

Or there's the novelette version: Returned at last from the extra-planetary refuge to which their beleagured ancestors fled, the vengeful lost Earthlings begin bombing Manhattan.

The three-part serial version is created by introducing cross-threads. The bush pilot is the older brother of the smitten explorer on Mars. The archeologist's daughter is a dead ringer for the girl in the mural. In the hidden chamber on Earth, the archeologist uncovers a working Martian weapon labelled as being specifically deadly to Earthpeople. When the bush pilot turns it on the charging natives, however, it sprays them with a harmless colored light. And so on. And so forth.*

Now, as any fool can plainly see, SF used to be almost nothing but open-idea stories, but now very much favors closed work (in the sense that most "sequels" are actually codicils, and that the first story would be entirely free-standing if the author hadn't deliberately put in codiciliary attachment points).

Any fool, in the words of Al Capp, could plainly see that. Now, then, since few of us are fools, what in truth is there to see?

Why, in the first place, would there be a trend toward closed fiction? That's easy — the literary establish-

*And, in strict terms of additional light shed on the original idea, not even possible to write a sequel, as distinguished from a codicil.

*The eventual filksong version begins
"Oh, the stardrive was discovered on the world of Dejah Thoris,
So they packed up all their topsoil and split for Far Centaurus!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment some time ago determined that open fiction is the lesser sort.

There's no organic reason for this to be true, any more than there's any excellent reason why the North Pole should be called "the top of the world." It so happened that most of the early (and recorded) astronomical work in this world was done (barely) north of the Equator. It so happens that the open story lends itself to high-volume writing much more readily than the closed story does, in most hands, and high-volume markets are apt to have "lower" standards of "realism." In our essentially puritanical culture, that which takes more effort to do is worthier; that which is least "frivolous" is best. In some other culture, that which comes most easily would be considered more attuned with the rhythms of life. Also, the concept of life having rhythms would fit tidily with the essential sensuality of romantic writing which generally is — and in its day most certainly was — what science fiction and newsstand fantasy are.

But we do, indeed, live in a culture dedicated to the ideal of brow-sweat and the furrowed brow, and so the closed story is the better story, if we are to have stories at all. Since most SF writers, critics and editors are now persons with sufficient academic experience of the best opinion on the best literature, we are moving from the open romanticism of the "Golden Age" amateur writers, taking a course toward the closed realism of contemporary writing. In the course of doing so, we are educating readers to respond to closed writing as the better writing, and incidentally educating writers in what the better mode is considered to be. Some of those writers are not budding novices. Some of them are from the "Golden Age," reaching out to where they are told the body of new readers is located, attempting, perhaps sadly, to accept that the old readers are gone.

L. Ron Hubbard in his bones knows better. Hubbard always had good bones; he was far more popular — in some cases, wildly popular — than contemporary views of the Golden Age will tell you. He didn't know much science, his engineering was a little odd, and he never stopped for rewrite, but there was a time — say, in 1940 — when if you had asked people who the outstanding Golden Age writer would be in the hindsight of 1983, you would have gotten just as many bets on Hubbard as you would have on Heinlein. Some days, A.E. van Vogt would have run a close third, and hardly anybody else would have shown a comparable following.

Isaac Asimov was known only to a few. Arthur C. Clarke was five years away, and, although many very good writers were working in the field, there were only three who could arouse 'em the way Heinlein, Hubbard and van Vogt could. This means, incidentally, that well over 50 per cent of the enthusiasm was for stories any good

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scholar could tell you weren't typical of the Golden Age. (Unfortunately, there are few excellent scholars, as you may have noticed me saying once or twice before.)

Now, what Hubbard *says* about the Golden Age is open to question, just as what Hubbard has ever said about anything has tended to serve the needs of the moment, he being above all things an instinctual and superlative salesman. His list of Golden Age authors as contained in the dedication to *Battlefield Earth* is clearly inaccurate; all those people may have been friends or acquaintances, but not all of them made the Golden Age.

Some were its victims, others were indifferent to it (his "C.A. Smith" is, presumably, Clark Ashton Smith), and still others, like Margaret St. Clair, ("Idris Seabright" in F&SF's formative years), Poul Anderson and James Blish, hit their stride in the 1950s, not the 1930s or '40s. I think a functionary put that list together, going by the chronology in a reference book, and Hubbard signed his name to it; surely it is not drawn from memory. As for memory, his version of his relationship to John Campbell, and Campbell's to science fiction, is so much at variance with contemporary received wisdom that, even though it *is* at variance, it lacks verisimilitude and will need some careful independent checking. I don't say it's wrong. I do say it's at serious variance and, *if* wrong, is particularly likely to muddy the waters in a way that will complicate the truth almost inextricably. So it needs objective corroboration.

But none of that has much to do with the story. Hubbard, in the same Foreword where he seems to be denying Don A. Stuart pre-existed him, mentions that this new novel is his present to his friends, in celebration of his fifty years as a pro author. He also says that it's pure science fiction, I think as an exercise in selling the proposition that it's not selling Scientology. I don't know what pure science fiction is; I'm pretty sure there is no Scientology in *Battlefield Earth* and no attempt to sell it, and it's curious to see Hubbard so sensitive on the subject. Finally, he says he had to study the patterns of contemporary SF in order to feel comfortable in writing *Battlefield*. This may be, but if so it is true in a particular way different from its face value.

Hubbard says he wrote — and presumably writes — "people stories." He goes to some lengths to proffer this as his major writing talent, and he apparently believes it. But is this true? Is there, in the work of L. Ron Hubbard or in the work of any other Golden Age author of stature, a character of the sort that is Hamlet's sort, or Captain Ahab's? I'm not talking about factors created by speaking through a shorter trumpet than Bill Shakespeare's or some other literary giant's. I'm talking about characters who, unlike Sherlock Holmes or Tarzan, or Hubbard's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

own Lieutenant in *Final Blackout*, are not superbly detailed caricatures but are, rather, persons meshed in a destiny made for them. That is, people like you and me, as distinguished from people we might like to be. Not necessarily towering figures like our prime examples, but figures whom we know exhaustively by the end of the story, as distinguished from those we know from their first appearance. Figures, in the end, who *may* tower, but, unlike the principal "people" in an open story, have the capacity not to.

The hero of an open story tries to present the *appearance* of having a destiny tailored just for him, mind you. Hubbard's Johnny Goodboy Tyler is no exception. Johnny, one of the few surviving human beings, lives in a tiny colony of degenerated humans up in the mountains where the invaders don't bother going. Surrounded by sloth, barbarity, physical weakness and ignorance, only Johnny Goodboy Tyler is bright, curious, energetic and willing to learn. This is because as a child he instinctively refused to carry water from the radioactive well.

The invaders — huge, shambling things — gassed Earth long ago and have been mining its resources ever since. Were they to be destroyed, somehow, by the 40,000 surviving humans led by Johnny Tyler, they would immediately be replaced as Earth's owners by any one of scores of races out in the known universes. So Johnny Goodboy Tyler alone can, and must, defeat the entirety of all Creation, in order to set Earth free. Which is to say, make Earth safely dominant over all those lesser breeds. This takes over 800 pages, but it does get done.

The book cries out for editing on every level. It contains spellings like "sulpher" and "niter," (and for that mat ter, "sulphur," which is just as wrong, sulfur not being a Greek name); it contains sentences like: "You, Thor, collect every man here we had with us at lode and a lot of Chinese."; it has a massive strip-up error beginning on Page 426 that transposes the end and beginning of a scene; it refers to an "armor-proofed" helmet, and it contains the embarrassing sub-plot about Bittie McLeod. It allows Hubbard to in effect say that only those who are courteous and industrious in seeing to the greater glory of this world's Johnny Goodboys are "decent" people worth his time in saving them. It is, in other words, an appalling job of presentation, viewed either as a $24 book or as an event in the life of L. Ron Hubbard and the SF community, and since it is both it is doubly appalling. St. Martin's has failed its clientele, and Hubbard's functionaries — surely Hubbard had the right to review the typeset text — have failed him.

But none of this is to say it isn't the vehicle for a rather good, fast-paced, often fascinating SF adventure yarn. That story is buried in a text that is 200 pages too long for it, but it *is* there.

And the striking thing about it is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that there is no trace of any attempt to "modernize." Rather, there are many places — the relationship between Johnny and his sweetheart, for instance — that any other writer would have done differently under the circumstances, but where Hubbard sticks resolutely to the peculiar intersexual mores of 1938.

I think that what he noticed when he studied our supposedly advanced literature was that it hardly represents any particular basic change at all; with a little grin of satisfaction, he realized he could just go ahead and write as if for ASF (as if L. Ron Hubbard were the proprietor and editor) and to hell with it.

Arthur C. Clarke was never going to write another book after *The Fountains of Paradise*, but he has. Like the film to which it is a sequel, *2010: Odyssey Two* is a sprawling, fragmented tale. But it lacks verve.

And verve is what it has to have. The central proposition is still that there are godlike powers in the Universe which have manipulated us for their own purposes. If there is someone out there who has been looking for a way to be an atheist and deist at the same time, this is an exciting premise. Otherwise, it is a stultifying one, and always has been.

The whole premise behind romantic fiction is its attempt to show that the universe is susceptible to human intervention, and I defy anyone to show me any notable stretch of Clarke prose — anything longer than a sentence or two — that is not intensely romantic. So what you have to do is show people becoming as gods, or overcoming the gods. And it's true that Bowman comes back from the abode of the gods and is as a demigod. But he had yet to *earn* any of that; it's all gifts, no one asked him whether he wanted them — the implication is that he would just as soon not — and he is still firmly under the thumb of the masters.

Furthermore, it turns out that despite all this backing-and-forthing, the ultimately triumphant race from the Solar System might be the one from the oceans of Europa; despite the multimillennia invested in human evolution and Terrestrial ecology, the secret masters for some reason now start up an ecology on Europa which will have to produce a civilization lacking fire. The idea, it seems to me, is to call all of human striving a mere exercise, lacking specific validity and worth. From the point of view of whatever secret masters there be, this may be perfectly rational. From the viewpoint of a human reader, however, while this thought may be majestic it is not one to take to the heart.

This is the essential story in *2010*; everything else is window-dressing, and meaningless as well.

There is a possible intellectual conspiracy between Dimitri Moisevich and Heywood Floyd to maintain intellectual purpose in human space explor-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ation. Don't bother getting interested in it; all subsequent events would have occurred as shown whether the Russian and the American had ever met in the antenna complex over the Arecibo radio telescope bowl or not. Clarke is sending us a picture for our gallery of true-life science wonders; he is not advancing the plot.

There is Floyd's second marriage. It comes apart offstage, for no discernible reason, since his *very* tentative romance with the Soviet cosmonaut is a phfft at first instance. It accomplishes *nothing* dramatic; it simply occurs. It's a page from an expedition's daybook. Floyd is of course terribly upset because now he will lose the love and companionship of his son. While Floyd is on Earth and the marriage is not only ongoing but almost 100% satisfactory, Clarke takes no opportunity to show us any special bond between the boy and the ousted bureaucrat, or any special strain on the marriage. When the marriage breaks up, Floyd is out at the orbit of Jupiter, as part of the international expedition to repair Hal the schizoid computer, recover the abandoned spaceship left when the masters seized Bowman, and check out the monolith still hanging around out there. In no way does the divorce affect his performance or attitude, or anyone else's performance or attitude.

There is the Chinese expedition to Europa. This is an utterly self-contained episode. Although Clarke writes in a few bridges to the main storyline, every word of that material could be cut, no other word would need to be cut, and the reader would never know anything had been omitted.

What this is, in other words, is an open idea on which the author has hung counterfeit, non-functioning appurtenances of the closed-idea story.

I have no doubt that many readers will proclaim this a terrific book, citing its "large" concepts as counterpointed by its "poignant" freight of "human incident." I say no; I say it's counterfeit. I say it's an old open idea: Suppose there *are* omnipotent things lurking in the closet! I say that the characters in this book are homunculi rather than humans, moving on tried-and-true tracks borrowed from a dozen other books supposedly concerned with character and human situation. And I think that as demonstrated here, these simulacra are less likeable and less worthy than frankly two-dimensional representations would have been.

The best parts of the book — the only poetic, moving parts — are the pictures from science. Beginning with the postcard from the telescope, Clarke brings us a succession of sweeping, breathtaking vistas describing the wonders of the universe. He is in some ways more a film-maker than Stanley Kubrick or even than someone who can tell a coherent story in film. As for the rest of it — the supposed story, the supposed human interaction, the supposed relevance to what you and I are as distinguished from what we fear,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or worship, or both, all I can say of this book is that it seems unlikely Clarke was burning to do it. Money talks in a monotone.

Foundation's Edge is of course a book many of us have been waiting for, and I rather suppose most of you reading this have read it by now. (Nobody at Doubleday thought to send F&SF an advance copy for review.)

There are things you might have noticed, as I did, while reading it. One, that it is structured not like an SF novel but like a novel of formal detection, with its cast of characters structured and maneuvered so as to provoke reader curiosity about who the least likely suspect is, and about what will emerge from the series of confrontations in which dialogue between Suspect A and Suspect B serves to raise possibilities about C while dashing our theories about A and B.

Another noticeable feature is that the story proceeds discursively. There are people from the First Foundation, people from the Second Foundation, and some extra people. Some of the First Foundation people have a vested interest in believing the Second Foundation was wiped out. One, a rebellious type, does not, and is exiled by a Mayor of Terminus whom I could not for the life of me separate from my image of Golda Meir. Some of the Second Foundation people have a vested interest in exiling a Speaker of theirs who thinks the Seldon Plan is going too smoothly to be true. And there are various other characters threaded in. What happens is that whenever they run or jump to anywhere, it is for the purpose of debating their contending points of view. All of the action is actually the scoring of points in a formal debate.

There is such an air of reasonability — more, I think, that an air of reason — about this book that it couldn't possibly be an open one. There is even that moment at which an authority figure turns to one of the human protagonists ... well, they're all human, but some more so than others ... and says, "Only *you*, because of your unique talents ... only you...." But that declaration, sprung on the reader as a gift given to the character, is the mark of an open idea. In a closed book, no one has to make such a declaration, and no one would dream of doing it.

Foundation's Edge is a likeable, leisurely book in its own right, and shares what has been a likeable attribute in the series. That is, it proposes fresh interpretations of what were supposedly settled matters in prior volumes. But what it then does is not like what has been done before; it frankly declares that nothing is solved, and that there will have to be further books.

Now, I hasten to add that there is nothing wrong with this in my estimation. I have no reason to feel that calling North "up" is either better or worse than calling it "down." I do know what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

society would expect me to call it, and, having no desire to confuse society, call it that way I shall. But ... I am sure you thought that of the three books covered here this month, only one would reveal its debt to the Golden Age. At the very least, you thought there was some fundamental distinction that could be drawn between L. Ron Hubbard and Asimov and Clarke. Distinctions can be drawn, to be sure — I expected I could do that. But I expected I could draw them deeper. Instead, I find that the similarities are crucial and the differences trivial. I find that where there is an attempt to deny the similarities that is precisely the place where the asserted differences falter and stumble.

And while I'm a little surprised to find it so, I'm also rather pleased. Because, as I hope you did too, I felt a rather nice little *frisson* over the idea about the Martian time-warp, and perhaps that feeling was generated by some power other than pure nostalgia.

Well, we don't have to decide right this minute. We haven't, in fact, decided much of anything, this time. Perhaps next time.

Coming soon

Next month: featured is a new novella by **Hilbert Schenck** ("Buoyant Ascent," March 1980). Its title is "Hurricane Claude," and it concerns a radical experiment with the objective of breaking up a savage storm. Also featured in the April issue will be **Avram Davidson** and **Grania Davis's** "The Hills Behind Hollywood High," a marvelous oddball tale about gorillas and motion pictures. Also: fantasy by **Gene Wolfe,** SF by **Bruce Sterling** and much more. The April issue is on sale March 3, or use the coupon on page 156.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here is an inventive piece of science fiction about a settlement on a world so hostile that it rejects any kind of technology or any object that is man-made, and rejects it in a strange and terrifying manner.

The Shadows of Evening

BY

TIMOTHY ZAHN

The late-afternoon sun was sending fingers of chilly darkness across the landscape as Turek topped the last hill and came within sight of the village of Akkad. He stood silently for a moment, looking down with mixed feelings at the sprawl of adobe huts. The village's growth in the years since he'd last been here was good, in a way; a sign that Man's foothold on this uniquely hostile world was increasing. But on the other hand, the more people in an area, the more trouble there generally was with Shadows. Not only were man-made objects in greater abundance to begin with, but there was always an idiot or two in a large village who simply wouldn't learn — and such, Turek suspected, was the case here. Tugging almost savagely on his blue cloak to resettle it on his shoulders, he headed down the hill.

The crowd around the jeweler's shop was something of a surprise to him when he arrived there. The messages had said the Shadow was a large one, but even large Shadows weren't usually worth any particular attention by the general populace. Pushing forward — no difficult task; the crowd parted like the Red Sea for him — he came to the inner edge of the ring and saw what they were looking at.

Sitting on the ground, gray face screwed up with pain and nausea, was a middle-aged man in a jeweler's apron. A plump woman knelt beside him, alternately fussing over him and scolding him for some action she clearly considered stupid. In front of him lay a rock-wood slab and a tray of tiny tools, some of which had spilled from their slots onto the dusty ground. On a cloth nearby lay a neat pile of delicate gold chains and sparkling gems.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Turek stood there silently for several seconds before the man noticed him and, gasping with the exertion, scrambled to his feet. Leaning on the woman, who'd also risen, he gave a shallow bow.

"Master Turek, please accept my humble thanks for your generous aid. It is an honor to stand in the presence of a Shadow Warrior, defender of the people—"

Turek cut him off with a wave of his hand. He'd heard a thousand welcoming speeches in the past twenty years and was tired of them. And the gray-faced man was worse than the average at it. "You are Merken the Jeweler?" he asked shortly.

The man bobbed his head. "Yes, Master Turek," he said. Already color was coming back into his wrinkled cheeks; Turek must have arrived just as the jeweler had emerged from the Shadow. For the second or third time, perhaps?

Turek nodded at the wooden slab and tools. "I told the messenger I'd come. Didn't you believe me?"

"Of course, Master, of course," Merken said hastily. "I just ... well, in case you were delayed ... I can't work inside, and I thought...."

"Um." Turek gazed speculatively at the jewelry shop doorway a dozen feet away. Shadows were invisible to normal sight, of course, but Shadow Warriors had techniques.... Settling his mind into the proper pattern, Turek closed his eyes and willed his pupils to dilate. Then, for a brief second, he snapped them open, closing them again as the sunlight triggered his blind reflex. Squeezing his eyelids tightly, he studied the afterimage burned for a moment onto his retina.

The Shadow was very clear.

Turek opened his eyes, blinking as the pupils readjusted, and looked at Merken. "It fills the whole building, and extends a good six feet outside," he told the jeweler. "What have you got in there?"

Merken already looked as distressed as he could, but the plump woman still standing beside him whitened slightly. "I'm a jeweler, Master; I have need of many tools and instruments which draw Shadows—"

"I trust you don't consider me an idiot," Turek said coldly. "I'm well acquainted with jeweler's tools, and I know how fast Shadows grow around them. *That*" — he waved at the shop — "wasn't caused by any normal tool. What did you make?"

"Please have mercy, Master," the woman blurted suddenly. "It wasn't his fault — I asked him to make it for me — it was my idea—"

"You aren't to blame," Merken interrupted her, taking a half-step to put himself between her and Turek. "I built it; it's *my* responsibility—"

"Cease!" Turek snapped, reducing them both to frightened silence. "I don't care a beggar's damn whose fault this is. You and your neighbors can thrash that out later. All *I* want to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

know is *what* it is."

"It's a foot-powered gem faceter," Merken mumbled, staring at the ground. "There's a small potter's wheel with adamant dust on it, with a treadle and a gearing system to keep the motion steady. I didn't mean any harm, Master — really. But Romneen here had to do it by hand, and it's hard, with her arthritis and all...." He trailed off.

Turek curled his lip. Always there was someone who seemed to believe the laws of the universe would graciously bend for his convenience. Glancing over his shoulder at the crowd, he raised his voice. "All right, you can all go back to your work now. There's nothing more to be seen here."

The people knew an order when they heard one. Within minutes Turek was alone on the street with the jeweler and his wife. "Relax," he told them, trying to dredge up some of the sympathy that had once been a prominent part of his personality. The effort was only partially successful. "I'm really *not* here to mete out punishment to anyone. Show me where it is."

Merken still looked shaky, but he nodded and started toward the doorway. "Yes, Master; this way."

The first wisps of feeling began as Turek passed the invisible edge he'd seen earlier. As usual, it started as a vaguely uncomfortable feeling, a sort of exaggerated nervousness. But as they stepped into the shop and walked across the front room it increased, and Turek could feel sweat popping out as his skin began to creep uncomfortably. A feeling of nausea grew steadily in the pit of his stomach; his heart was already pounding loudly. His eyes felt like they were being squeezed into his skull. Firmly, he fought the Shadow's attack — and almost blundered into Merken as the jeweler stopped abruptly and pointed with a trembling hand at a door behind the service counter. "In there," he managed, gagging. Turning, he fled the building.

Turek snorted with contempt as he continued alone. Behind the door, under a high window, he found the device Merken had described.

He stood there a moment, swaying only slightly, as he studied the mechanism. The tapered gears were made entirely from wood, as was the potter's wheel and a device that appeared to be some sort of speed governor. Turek smiled grimly as he realized there wasn't a scrap of metal anywhere on the apparatus. The jeweler was apparently one of those who believed that something wasn't technology if it didn't make use of wrought metal. Any Shadow Warrior could have told him *differently, of course — if he'd bothered to ask.*

A touch of dizziness swept over Turek, reminding him he was wasting time in the most uncomfortable of places. Bracing himself against the doorjamb, he set his teeth and focused his mind; just *so*....

For a moment he felt nothing but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sickness in his body. Then, abruptly, something seemed to click—

And he was in union with the Shadow.

The darkness came like a wave, threatening to overwhelm him, to drag him into some nameless place where light never pierced. With practised ease he deflected the assault and launched his counterattack. *Be destroyed! Scatter to the winds!*

It resisted his blow, and for an instant Turek seemed to hear something: like voices, but faint and wordless and inhuman. And then he felt the resistance break, and he was back in the jewelry shop.

Pushing off from the doorjamb, Turek headed back outside, walking as quickly as pride allowed. Clearly, the Shadow still existed; he hadn't expected to destroy it completely with a single assault. But his body told him it had reached its limit, and he knew better than to push Shadow-contact past that point. Besides, it would be easier to tell how much damage he'd done from outside.

He stepped from the building, and almost immediately felt the Shadow's effect disappear. A good sign; and when he'd regained some of his strength he checked it visually. Sure enough, the edge of the Shadow had receded almost four feet.

Merken and his wife were standing by the pile of jewelry and tools, looking nervous. "It's going to take several days, but I can do it," Turek told them.

"Several *days?*" Merken echoed, looking stricken.

"Yes, *days,*" Turek snapped with a flash of anger. "And you're lucky I'm going to do it at all. Of all people, a craftsman like you should have known how fast Shadow collects around something that's obviously man-made."

"I'm sorry, Master, truly sorry," Merken said, cringing.

"Oh, forget it," Turek muttered, disgusted both with the jeweler and with himself. He shouldn't have gotten angry; the little fool had just been trying to make life a little bit easier for himself.

Even after ten generations, some realities were hard to accept.

A cool breeze found its way underneath Turek's cloak. He shivered, glancing upward to locate the sun. Only an hour or so until sunset; he'd been in there with the Shadow longer than he realized. "I can't do any more here today," he told Merken. "Is Persh's Inn still in business?"

"Yes, Master. Just down this street and turn—"

"I know where it is. I'll be back in the morning."

Turning on his heel, Turek headed down the street.

Persh's Inn was pretty much as Turek remembered it, though he'd only spent an afternoon there the last time he was in Akkad. He had barely seated him-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

self at an empty table when the proprietor bustled up.

"Welcome back, Master Turek," Persh said, placing a carved-wood mug of lukewarm tarri in front of him. "How may I serve you?"

Turek smiled slightly. "Your memory for names is good. Do you remember how I like my tannu roast done?"

Persh's eyes defocused for an instant. "Lemon-seared rare, as I recall, Master. Served with salted green roll and plenty of hot tarri."

"Very good," Turek nodded. "I'll have the same now. Also, I'll need a room for the night."

"Yes, Master. Anything else you'd like?" The tone suggested *anything* meant exactly that.

For an instant Turek's gaze flickered past the innkeeper to the girl serving at the bar — Persh's daughter, probably. For a moment he was tempted.... "No, nothing else. Tell me, how are the Shadows around here? Any need clearing out?"

Persh shrugged. "Oh, a few are getting to a fairly uncomfortable size, but nothing is really critical. We're careful to keep our tools as primitive as possible, you know, while still being able to serve our customers. Of course, we'd surely appreciate it if you'd clear some of the Shadows out while you're here, but it's not like you *have* to for your — uh...."

"For my room and board?" Turek felt his expression hardening.

"Uh ... yes, Master. Of *course* your stay here is without charge — we honor the old customs—"

"Just bring me my dinner," Turek interrupted him. "I'll clear out your Shadows later."

"Yes, Master; thank you, Master." Persh hurried away across the room.

Turek watched him go, his irritation melting into a mild depression. Fear; and an exaggerated deference that bordered on apotheosis. Simple friendship — the kind he'd had with people in his first few years as a Shadow Warrior — seemed to have all but vanished from his life. Only with other Shadow Warriors could he really be accepted just for who he was.

The other tables were filling up as the workday drew to a close and people stopped in for dinner or a quick drink. Frequent bursts of laughter began to punctuate the growing din of conversation; clearly, Akkad as a whole didn't seem unduly concerned by the presence of a large Shadow in their village. Turek listened silently to the noise, feeling more isolated than ever, and found himself watching the girl behind the bar. As recently as a couple of years ago he would've taken Persh up on his implied offer of feminine company. But the same fear had permeated that type of interaction, too, and the results were increasingly disappointing. Resolutely, he turned his gaze from the girl. No sense torturing himself.

Persh arrived a few moments later with a large plate heaped with food

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and set it down in front of Turek, snagging a pitcher of tarri from a passing waiter and refilling the Shadow Warrior's half-empty mug. Bowing nervously, he backed away, a trifle too hurriedly. Sighing, Turek picked up his flatware and began to eat.

The meal was something of a disappointment. The tannu, while juicy enough, lacked some of the subtle flavors he remembered from his last visit. The green roll, too, seemed to have been overcooked, leaving some of the vegetables on the tasteless side. Only the tarri tasted right, and even it was no better than the tarri a man could get anywhere.

Engrossed in his meal, Turek didn't notice the slight dip in conversation noise; didn't notice anything, in fact, until the bulky man settled into the chair opposite him.

Startled, Turek looked up — and smiled. "Weege! What're you doing here?"

The other man slid his blue Shadow Warrior's cloak off onto the chair back with a sigh that bespoke tiredness. "Oh, that feels good. Hello, Turek. What am I doing here? Eighty percent passing through; twenty percent looking for you."

"Oh, I'm flattered." Turek signaled, but he needn't have bothered; Persh was already hurrying over with a mug and pitcher. "What's is it, trouble somewhere?"

"Not really." Weege nodded his thanks for the tarri as Persh poured, waving off the innkeeper's offer of dinner. "I'd hoped to catch you at Keilberg, but when I arrived they told me you'd come here. It was more or less on my way, so I thought I'd drop by with the current rumor." He took a sip from his steaming mug. "Tell me, have you ever heard of a guy named Javan? Comes from somewhere north of Lazuli."

"The self-proclaimed mystic? Sure. Claims to have a new way to destroy Shadows. Standard fruitcake."

"Maybe," Weege said, gazing into the depths of his mug. "But he's causing quite a stir. I hear he's got close on a hundred disciples and students now and is claiming a high success rate against Shadows."

Turek frowned. "A hundred students, eh? That's a good-sized army for a charlatan."

"Yeah. Some of us think it's time we challenged him, put him to a real test."

"Not our problem here, though. Lazuli's a long ways off."

"Javan isn't, though," came the dry response. "He's just a few hours' walk from here, up at Lander's Waste."

Turek sat up straighter. "Up by the old ship? What for?"

"Probably going to practice his technique. You can't find a bigger Shadow on the planet, you know."

"The kid sure thinks big," Turek growled. The old colony ship that had brought mankind to Vesper hadn't been approached since the day it land-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ed, the day when its seven hundred passengers and crew ran gasping from it and the Shadow which had begun to grow around it. For a while they'd feared the Shadow might grow forever, engulfing the whole planet in agony, but it had finally stopped. Legend had it that right by the ship itself the Shadow was dense enough to kill. "Maybe he'll try to walk to the ship. That would settle the whole thing right there."

"I doubt he's stupid enough to do *that*. No, he's probably doing this for the psychological value — you know, brave new Warrior camping on the doorstep of Shadow."

"Yeah." Turek gazed unseeing around the room, drumming his fingers thoughtfully on the table. "Maybe we *ought* to go up and challenge him. I'm on a job, but I could put it off a day."

"It's completely up to you," Weege said. "I can't go with you; like I said, I'm just passing through. Calneh's got a crisis situation on their hands, and they need my help. In fact, I can't even stay the night." He got to his feet, scooping his cloak with one hand and his mug with the other. Draining the latter, he dropped it back on the table and nodded at Turek. "We'll see you around, Turek. Give Javan a boot for me if you go."

"Sure. Safe trip to you."

Turek brooded for several minutes after Weege left, trying to decide what to do. The idea of facing down a hundred zealots did not especially appeal to him, even if they weren't far enough gone yet that they would actually attack a Shadow Warrior. But allowing a charlatan to operate unchallenged was a bad idea, too. Among other things, it tarnished the image of legitimate Shadow Warriors.

The decision actually came easily. Merken's shop would just have to wait an extra day. Turek couldn't feel particularly sorry about it — after all, the mess was the jeweler's own fault. Maybe next time he'd think before playing with advanced technology.

Flagging down Persh, Turek asked that a message be sent to Merken informing him there would be a short delay in the clearing out of his Shadow. Then he returned to his meal, discovering in the process that it wasn't any more palatable cold than it had been warm. He ate it, though, and downed two more mugs of tarri before calling it an evening.

And before going to bed, he spent an hour clearing Shadows from the inn's kitchen and tool room.

He was up with the sun, and after a tolerable breakfast he set off for Lander's Waste.

It turned out to be a surprisingly refreshing walk. He was in no particular hurry for this confrontation, and as a result set a more comfortable pace than usual for himself. The meal Persh had packed at his request — Turek had no

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intention of breaking bread with Javan — rode easily on his shoulder, over his blue cloak. For the first time in months Turek found himself paying attention to the landscape around him, really *looking* at the multicolored plants dotting the gently rolling scrubland. Small animals darted around or sought cover as he passed; twice he spotted the double-wedge of migrating oriflammes, their red-gold plumage vivid against the deep blue of the sky. It was invigorating and strangely restful, as if he'd somehow been transported back to his youth, to the days before he became a Shadow Warrior. The blue cloak carries great weight, as the double-edged aphorism went, but even those who wore it seldom realized just how heavy the load was. To be free of the weight for even a few hours was an unexpected blessing.

An hour before noon, he reached Lander's Waste.

The term "waste" was somewhat misleading, since it looked no different than the area immediately surrounding it. Native Vesperian plants and animals thrived there, completely unaffected by the eight-mile-diameter Shadow that had enveloped them for the past two hundred years. A ring of red granite boulders, laboriously moved there by the original colonists, marked the Shadow's edge. Just for practice, Turek used his afterimage technique, and confirmed the edge was still where it always had been. No surprises there. Someday, he knew, the ship at the center would start to fall apart, its tools and machines collapsing back into dust — and when that finally happened, the Shadow would begin to shrink. Even as Turek began his circumference of the Waste, he shook his head in wonder. Two hundred years. Someone had really built that ship to last.

He'd gone less than a mile before he came upon Javan's camp, a sprawling tent city pushing nearly to the edge of the Shadow. A quick count showed Weege's estimate had been, if anything, conservative — there were easily enough accomodations here for a hundred and fifty people. A fair percentage of that number were visible around the area, doing various chores or sitting motionlessly just outside the boulder ring. Squaring his shoulders, Turek strode forward.

They saw him coming, of course, and a committee of five teen-aged youths met him a hundred feet from the nearest tent. "Greeting to you, Master Shadow Warrior," their spokesman said formally in a voice that mixed friendliness, respect, and wariness. "I am Polyens. How may I serve you?"

"I am Turek," the Shadow Warrior told him. "I'm here to see Javan."

"May I ask your business?"

Turek felt the first stirrings of anger. "My business is with Javan, not his gulls."

A low rumbling from the group cut off instantly at a signal from Polyens, and Turek revised upwards his esti-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mate of the youth's position in the organization. Polyens' next words confirmed it. "I'm an aide to Javan, not merely one of his students. Do you pledge safety?"

Turek smiled sardonically. "In the middle of his own camp? Of course. Besides" — he raised the sides of his cloak away from his body — "you can see I'm unarmed."

"Very well. Please come with me."

Polyens led the way inward, the other four youths falling into step a few feet behind Turek. An untrusting lot, he thought, ignoring the covert looks others in the camp threw at him as he passed. Once more he was among people who feared — or even hated — him, and the youthful feeling of the early morning was gone without a trace. He was again a veteran Shadow Warrior, with all that that meant.

They came to a tent near the Shadow's edge, and Polyens disappeared inside. Almost immediately he emerged, accompanied by a cheerful-faced young man who couldn't be over twenty-five years old.

"Greeting to you, Master Turek," he said, bowing with what seemed to be genuine respect. "I am Javan; welcome to my school. May I offer you refreshment?"

Turek shook his head. "I'm not here as a friend, Javan. I've come to issue a challenge."

Polyens took a step toward Turek, his face thunderous, but Javan stopped him with a touch. "Peace. It's not a regular challenge; he's asking me to prove my abilities against Shadow."

Polyens relaxed. "Oh, I thought you were breaking your pledge," he explained, a little sheepishly.

Javan bailed him out. "Why don't you go get us some water?" he suggested. "Master Turek must be thirsty."

"At once." Looking relieved, Polyens hurried out.

"I've already said—" Turek began.

"I know," Javan interrupted him. "But you can surely drink water with me without commitment. Besides" — he smiled ingenuously — "it's been a long time since I've had the chance to talk with a Shadow Warrior. Won't you please indulge me?"

Turek shrugged. "Oh, all right." Ducking under the flap, he entered Javan's tent.

Given the size of his following, Turek had expected Javan would live in somewhat greater luxury than the tent's furnishings showed. The bed and straw-filled contour chairs were of the sort that any peasant might own, and aside from a simple candlestick to augment the light from the tent's windows, there wasn't anything "advanced" to be seen anywhere. Turek mentally added a point to his side: anyone who claimed power over Shadows shouldn't be afraid to own Shadow-drawing items.

"Your accent sounds mid-Southern," Javan commented as he gestured Turek to one of the contour chairs. "Are you from Paysan, by any chance?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Keilberg," Turek said shortly.

"Ah. I've never been there, but I've heard good things about it." Javan paused as Polyens appeared with a pitcher of water and two mugs. The youth poured in silence and left, and Javan raised his cup. "To your health," he said, drinking deeply and then setting aside the mug. "And now tell me, Master Turek — what are your thoughts concerning Shadow?"

Turek blinked once, caught off-guard by the unexpected question. "What do you mean?"

"How do you visualize it when you battle it? As a natural phenomenon like rot, or as a living force?"

Turek sipped at his water, considering. He'd never thought about it in exactly those terms before. "I don't know. Sometimes I seem to hear voices when I'm fighting it. But on the other hand, it doesn't seem to learn or to focus its effect in any way, like you'd expect it to if it were trying to destroy us." He shrugged. "I'm not sure it makes any difference *what* it is. It grows; we clear it out."

"It *does* make a difference," Javan disagreed quietly. "If it's not alive, there may indeed be only one way to get rid of it, like cutting rot away from fruit. But if it *is* alive, there may be several ways to attack it."

Turek put his mug on the ground and crossed his arms across his chest. Now the conversation was going somewhere. "I already know one way to attack Shadow — and, in case you've forgotten, it took our ancestors five generations to develop it. So tell me about this new method you've got that everyone else has somehow missed."

"First of all, I should point out I'm also familiar with the standard way. I don't suppose you know, but I studied for three years to become a Shadow Warrior. And I didn't miss the cut," he added, correctly interpreting Turek's expression. "I left voluntarily."

"Why? Afraid you couldn't handle the Final Test?"

"Maybe partly. But mainly because of all the ones who *didn't* make the apprentice cut. It seemed such a waste of effort, on everyone's part."

"Fighting Shadows isn't easy. It takes strength of mind and a lot of stamina."

"Certainly, the way you do it. But I've found an easier way." Javan hunched forward earnestly. "You see, the usual method involves a sort of head-to-head confrontation where you have to basically *overpower* the Shadow — fight it with its own weapons, so to speak. The problem with that is that you have to go right into the Shadow, where it's strongest, and actually make contact with it. It's a terrific strain, which ages Shadow Warriors far before their time, and even seems to affect their personalities."

"Our personalities are not your concern," Turek said bluntly. "As for the rest of it, it's the price we pay to help the people of Vesper. And we pay it willingly."

"I'm sure you do. But it's not neces-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sary. You don't need to out-darken the darkness, so to speak. You can use light."

"Light?" Turek had lost track of all the charlatans throughout history who had tried using light against Shadow.

"Yes — but not the kind you mean. It's an *inner* light, a sort of psychic glow."

"That's absurd."

Turek hadn't really intended the words to sound so harsh, but that was the way they came out. Javan reddened with anger. "So now you're going to give the verdict before the trial? Very convenient — saves time, I imagine."

"Don't worry; you're not going to get me into that old trap," Turek said grimly. " 'Shadow Warrior persecution' is a standard charlatan excuse, and I'm going to make sure you can't use it."

"Charlatan!" Javan stood up abruptly, glaring down at Turek. For a moment the tent was filled with a brittle silence as Javan slowly regained a grip on his temper. "All right; enough talk, then. Name the test."

Turek closed his eyes, opened and closed them again. No good. Shadows eventually grew up around anything man-made, but with the primitive furnishings of Javan's tent the effect was much too slow to worry about. The Shadows blanketing the chairs and candlestick were thin enough that anyone with a modicum of Shadow Warrior training could handle them, and Turek had no intention of making things that easy for Javan. "Nothing worth doing in here. Let's go outside."

After the relative dimness of the tent the bright sunlight was dazzling, and Turek made use of it for two more afterimage searches. Again he was out of luck: no decent Shadows were visible anywhere. "You keep a clean camp," he grunted.

Javan shrugged. "The meditation required to learn my technique is hampered when a student is surrounded by lots of different Shadows. The learning comes quicker when there's just a single strong Shadow to work on."

A malicious smile tugged at the corners of Turek's mouth. "Thanks for reminding me. There *is* a decent-sized Shadow around for your test."

Javan seemed taken aback. "You can't mean Lander's Waste."

"Why not? Ordinary Shadow Warrior technique is useless against something that size. Ideal way to prove your stuff."

"That's completely unfair—" Javan began, but just then Polyens came around the corner of the tent.

"Excuse me, Javan, but there's a man here to see you about clearing out a Shadow," he said, his eyes flickering between his master and Turek. "He said it was important."

With one final glare at Turek, Javan deliberately turned to Polyens. "Bring him here."

Polyens looked toward the rear of the tent and nodded, and a middle-aged man came nervously into view.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was Merken the Jeweler.

He froze in mid-step as he recognized Turek, and the color drained from his face. "Master Turek!" he gasped.

Turek took a step toward him, fists clenched at his side, a sour taste in his mouth. "Yes, Merken, it's me. What's the matter, didn't you trust me to come back? You thought I was going to break my word?"

Merken was rapidly approaching a state of terror. "No, Master, no! But your message said you'd be delayed, and I didn't know how long, and I just thought — I mean, I've heard of Javan — and I thought maybe...." He ran out of words as he tried to burrow deeper into his cloak.

Turek took another step forward ... and Javan was suddenly between him and Merken. "What seems to be the problem?" he asked calmly.

"Nothing!" Turek bit out. "Apparently the residents of Akkad don't trust Shadow Warriors. Fine; I'll see to it that no Shadow Warrior ever goes near the place again."

Turek had thought Merken's face as devoid of color as possible, but now he had the satisfaction of seeing the jeweler whiten still further. "Wait," he choked. "Please. It would destroy Akkad — no one could ever live there again."

"You should have thought of that before you decided I wasn't trustworthy." Turning his back, Turek began to walk away.

"Just a moment, Master Turek," Javan called.

Turek spun around, half expecting to see Javan's minions approaching with fighting sticks drawn. But no one moved. "What?"

"It seems to me this would be a good opportunity for you to test my technique. I take it that this Shadow is one even a Shadow Warrior would have trouble with?"

"It'll take several attacks to get rid of it," Turek muttered, thoughts racing. It *would* be a good test, come to think of it — there was no way Javan could use Shadow Warrior methods against it without that being obvious. And there would be neutral witnesses there, enough to counter Javan's forces even if he brought his whole army along. "All right," he said at last. "The Shadow in Merken's shop — that's your test."

Javan nodded. "Good. We can leave immediately, if you're agreeable. Just let me get a few things for the trip."

Javan either had a great deal of confidence in himself or he shrewdly realized that descending on Akkad with a mob of his partisans would be ill-advised and unproductive. Thus, only four men left Lander's Waste a half-hour later: Turek, Merken, Javan, and Polyens.

Turek walked in front, alone. His anger at Merken had cooled, leaving an undefinable ache in its place. Why

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he had reacted so violently before, he still didn't know, and it both irritated and worried him. After all, there was nothing like a contract between Merken and himself, and he *had* forgotten to mention in his message that he would probably not be gone more than a day. But logic didn't help, and the hurt remained.

If the others noticed his irritation, they didn't show it. Javan, especially, ignored him, preferring instead to keep up a more or less running conversation with Merken, asking about everything from the jeweler's family to the quality of life in Akkad. From his position ahead of them Turek couldn't help but hear every word, and he listened closely. But if Javan was just trying to swing Merken onto his side, he was doing a superb job of it. Nowhere in voice or questions could Turek detect anything but honest friendliness.

It was late afternoon when they reached Akkad. Merken's wife had clearly been on the lookout for them; she and a small crowd of neighbors were waiting at the shop when the four men arrived. Ignoring the uneasy looks the villagers were giving him, Turek stepped into the middle of the group. "In accordance with the laws and customs of Vesper, I hereby challenge the man Javan to prove his claimed power over Shadow," he announced, keeping his expression and voice neutral. "You are all called upon to be witnesses." Turning, he faced Javan and gestured toward the jewelry shop.

Javan walked forward slowly, stopping at the edge of the Shadow. For a moment he stood quietly, and Turek saw him use what seemed to be a slight modification of the Shadow Warrior afterimage technique. He raised his right hand, open palm just touching the Shadow, and the faint murmuring of the crowd cut off into an expectant silence. Turek watched him closely, every sense alert for whatever trickery he was about to use.

—And suddenly Javan blazed with light!

With a cry, Turek stepped back, instinctively throwing an arm over his face. But it was a useless gesture; the searing glare was in his mind, not his eyes. Desperately, he tried to fight it, to block it the way he'd blocked the thousands of Shadow attacks throughout the years. But for once it didn't work, and there was no time to make it work, for even as his defense cracked before the onslaught he felt himself falling....

And the light vanished into a cool and welcome darkness.

The darkness lightened only slowly, and seemed somehow mixed with a cool wetness. As if from the bottom of a deep pond, Turek struggled upward and finally came awake.

He opened his eyes. He was lying on the floor of Merken's jewelry shop, his head pillowed on something soft. Beside him knelt Javan, his brow furrowed, wringing out a wet cloth into a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

small basin. "Never mind that," Turek said hoarsely.

Javan's head came around with obvious surprise. "You're awake," he said, dropping the cloth back into the basin. "How do you feel?"

"What do you care?" Turek glanced around the room, and for the first time noticed the lack of Shadow symptoms. "The Shadow?"

"Destroyed," Javan said. There was no trace of triumph in his voice. "Polyens and some of the others took Merken's device to the edge of town to break it up before the Shadow starts growing back."

Turek looked up at the youth, feeling his whole body sag. "You destroyed it," he said, the words tasting like ashes in his mouth. "You really did it — and with enough power left over to blast me, too."

Javan shook his head, his eyes full of concern. "That wasn't on purpose, Turek, believe me. I don't understand what happened to you. Most people can't see the light at all, much less be bothered by it — even I can just barely detect it. Merken's wife Romneen has gone for a doctor; maybe he can help."

"Never mind him — I'm all right. And it's probably never happened before because you've never had a Shadow Warrior present." Laboriously, Turek got to his feet, brushing off Javan's attempts to help him. "You said it yourself, this morning. Remember? Close contact with Shadows affects your personality." He wavered for a moment, as a brief touch of dizziness came and went. "I expect I've ... absorbed ... too much of Shadow into myself. However that light of yours burns up Shadow, it hit me, too."

"I'm sorry," Javan said in a low voice. "I had no idea."

"Forget it. It's not going to be a problem for you. Once the word is passed, the rest of the Shadow Warriors will stay out of your way." Turek's cloak and food bag sat on a nearby chair, the latter reminding him he'd skipped lunch and was ravenously hungry. No matter; he could eat once he was out of town. Picking up his things, he headed toward the door.

"Where are you going?" Javan asked.

"I'm leaving Akkad, of course."

"Why?"

Turek paused to fasten his cloak. "Why not? I'm not needed here anymore."

He started forward again, but with a few quick strides Javan passed him and stood in the doorway. "Master Turek, I don't wish to part as enemies. Won't you please try to understand what I'm trying to do?"

Turek stopped. "I understand completely. You want to clear all the Shadows from Vesper, to free mankind from the drudgery of having to do everything by hand. Why do you think *I* became a Shadow Warrior?"

"Then you have to realize what this new method means for our people. It's easier to learn, takes much less effort

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the same results, and — most important of all — doesn't require that constant penetration of Shadow that you've had to go through. It'll free all of us up that much more, you included. It'll be *good* for Vesper."

The youth was almost pleading, Turek realized — pleading for Turek's blessing, or at least his acceptance. But the Shadow Warrior remained silent, and after a moment Javan bowed his head slightly and stepped aside.

The sun was low in the sky as Turek set off for the edge of town. It would be night long before he could reach Keilberg, but he didn't care; anything was better than staying in the same village with Javan.

He paused at the top of the first hill to tighten his cloak and his gaze almost magnetically turned back toward Akkad. Already it was too dark to see individuals unless they carried candles, but in his mind's eye he could see Javan and Polyens as they celebrated their victory over Shadow ... and over the Shadow Warriors.

Turek smiled humorlessly. Yes, he understood Javan perfectly; that youthful idealism and desire to serve might once have been Turek's own. And the new technique *would* be beneficial ... at least for Vesper as a whole.

But for the Shadow Warriors?

Turek had grappled with Shadow for half his life, had sweated and suffered and gotten sick so that others could maintain their precarious existence on this world. He'd kept at it doggedly, long after the warm glow of youthful enthusiasm had faded, even long after the multitude of Shadow-contacts had begun to poison every facet of his being, until only a dry sense of duty was left to keep him going. A wife, a family, any kind of normal life — all had been impossible for him to have.

He'd given his entire *life* to battle ... but now Javan had proved that the sacrifice hadn't been necessary, that an easier way was possible.

And Turek had wasted his life for nothing.

"It's not fair!" he shouted abruptly at the blood-red sunset. "Do you hear me? *It's not fair!*"

There was no answer, and after a moment Turek turned his back on Akkad and continued on into the growing darkness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Richard Mueller's new story begins with a group of pilots who contract to deliver some 35-year-old airplanes from Argentina to Los Angeles and then focuses on one pilot and one plane with an unsettling history...

Welcome To Coventry

BY
RICHARD MUELLER

He wasn't sure whether it had been the dream that had awakened him or the pounding on the door. The dream had often brought him to, screaming at first, later sweating, finally with only headaches and a dry gravel throat. He'd kept an approximate count. It had come two hundred and ten times in the last four years and he knew that he never would be totally free of it. Some residue, some memory would remain, like a puckered discoloration of skin to remind him of the time of the wounding, the loss forever of his most profound and unshakable innocence. With trembling fingers he raked his hair into place and told the calming haiku again, sweet rationalization to his tortured soul. In desolation, distance brings me soft surcease, from reality. Yes, distance softens anything. The pounding came again.

"*Señor* McKenney. *Son las cinco.*"

Five o'clock. His wake-up call. His feet hit the floor, expecting to send bugs scuttling, dust and mold quivering, mosquito netting swaying, but it was still. He was here. The hotel was good, first class: deep-pile carpeting, Utrillo bullfight prints, telephone, ice bucket, television capable of picking up any station between Asunción and Rivadavia. His flight jacket hung over the chair.

"*Señor?*"

"Yes, thank you ... uh, *gracias.*" The presence retreated. He was alone. One and a half hours to get to the airport, check in, pick up his gear. He stumbled about, collecting his khakis, shoes, duffel bag, all the time mumbling softly to himself. Distance brings me soft surcease.

The rental car started, the route remembered, no trouble with the sentry.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He parked at the end of the flight line, the row of refurbished T-28s gleaming under ready lights, their Argentine Air Force markings painted out. Now that the sale was complete, international recognition numbers had been assigned and they squatted there, identical, ignoring the pacing mechanics and guards. They're over thirty-five years old, he thought. I must be thoroughly crazy taking this on, but there's $5,000 and transportation back to the States. That part of it makes very good sense.

The pilots milled around the flight office, gossiping or checking through their equipment. Several Argentine liaison officers in lighter serge uniforms, stamping against the cold, were answering questions or passing out coffee. A map on the wall traced their flight plan in red. It was a nice touch, though McKenney knew that they'd all memorized it.

"Pablo," a voice called. "Over here." It was the other two members of his echelon: Swift, American; and Kumar Alwa, Indian. Alwa's leather jacket looked too large for him, and the white of his teeth formed a crescent moon against his dark face. The others' faces had been dark also, upturned, following. McKenney shook it off.

Swift had a pointed, ratty face and thick glasses. Generally slovenly, he was one of the finest pilots in the group and McKenney had no quarrel with the choice of his running mates.

"You're late."

He grinned, the wide, winning McKenney smile that his family had been using to lubricate their lives since the first of them had been transported. "I'm right on time. How goes it?"

Alwa shrugged. "You're not the last to arrive. Are you ready for this?"

He looked at the map. The line ran from Buenos Aires to Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro to Bahia, Bahia to Fortaleza. At Fortaleza it bent west to Belém at the mouth of the Amazon, thence to Georgetown, Willemstad, Kingston, Belize, and across Mexico to Los Angeles. Nearly 12,000 miles at a mean cruising speed of 200 mph. He glanced at the flight packs: food, water, poly sacks for urine and fecal wastes, maps, star charts, sextant, raft, chute, first-aid kit, survival rifle, flares, and assorted bits of esoterica.

"Ready as I'll ever be. They want to pay me $2,000 a day for my services, it's fine, just fine."

Swift laughed. "That's right by me. You checked out your plane?"

"Not yet," McKenney muttered, taking in the scene. Thirty pilots, the best available. It would be one for the records. A dangerous, textbook exercise.

"What?"

"I said, your plane's haunted."

McKenney and Alwa looked at Swift, who sketched a nervous grin through his falling dishwater hair.

"That's right, haunted."

"Run that by me again, mate."

"Sure. Simple story. The mechanics

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

told me. About four years ago they had these T-28s decked out for ground attack: bombs, light machine guns, even rockets — the works. The squadron was chasing Tupamaros up by the Bolivian border, just little shoot-landing hits. Find the village, throttle back, cut the engine and drift in. Come in low, plaster the village with napalm or frag, then kick in the horses and pull out. Nasty business."

Alwa whistled but McKenney just nodded. He was feeling that peculiar sensation of losing touch with his body, a retreat from reality. Distancing. Swift went on.

"Anyway, a flight of three found what they thought was a Tupe village and went in. It was a textbook killing, until the flight leader realized they had the wrong village and called a break-off."

"And this bird didn't get it?"

"Uh-uh. He got it. But when he cut back in he found he didn't have enough lift to pull clear. He was skimming treetops and the plane was coughing, so he jettisoned."

"Jesus...."

"He was carrying frag, and both bombs hit the village as he passed over it. They shredded the town square, which was full of indios who had come out to see what all the noise was about. It was very messy: dead women, children with entrails hanging out. Pure Peckinpah stuff. Very gross."

"And the plane?" Alwa asked.

"Divine retribution," Swift snickered, looking even more ratlike, and in that moment McKenney hated him. Swift, the pacifist, who had not served and who could not know the moment of fire and the years of guilt. "The blast blew out the engine, and the plane coasted in through a canebrake, neat as you please, and came to rest in a river."

Swift stopped to clean his glasses, pausing for effect. "Finish it," McKenney said savagely. Swift, puzzled, not realizing that he'd dug too deeply.

"His mates saw him go down and called in, so they sent out a recovery team. The plane was salvageable with the addition of a new undercarriage and ten, twenty thousand worth of aluminum. The indios had nailed the pilot to a tree. Crucified him."

Alwa shuddered. A few other pilots had drifted in to listen to the story.

"But the weird thing is what they found in the cockpit."

"What?"

"It seems that the blasts had killed most of the tribal council, including the medicine man. To give the medicine man a proper burial, they had placed him in the rear seat of the trainer and had filled the front seat with his worldly goods: beads, weapons, cloaks and like that. They were about to burn the old boy in the plane and consecrate the ceremony when the soldiers showed up and chased them off."

"What'd they do with the body?"

"Buried it there by the river, paid an indemnity to the indios and brought

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the plane back to B.A. But the story doesn't end there."

"It never does," McKenney said, narrowly.

"Bear with me. So, since then, on several occasions, pilots flying solo have felt a presence in the rear seat. Always flying alone and always at night, and when they looked: nothing. Seems he doesn't show in the day. Prefers the night, he does."

The phrasing was almost English and McKenney knew that he was being ribbed. He looked into Swift's grin and grinned back. "Good. Then I should have a couple of nights to get acquainted, shouldn't I?"

Swift blinked, his bluff called, and the conversation froze until Alwa punched his shoulder and cried, "Good for you, Pablo. No ghosts to frighten you, eh?"

Swift shrugged and looked thoughtful.

The takeoffs began at dawn, the planes climbing to 18,000 feet and bearing northeast toward Rio. The rear seat was taken up with gasoline in a huge plastic collapsible, and another 500 pounds rode below in a drop-tank. At cruising speed, they would reach L.A. with half an hour's worth to spare. Close timing. They would fly in ten echelons of three, two pilots always awake and one sleeping on autopilot. If the autopilot should cut out or stray, the other pilots would be able to trigger alarm systems in the cockpit to rouse the sleeper. As long as nothing failed, the arrangement should work fine.

McKenney lugged his flight kit to the cockpit, looking up at the new American numbers on the wings and fuselage. The planes had been purchased by a northern California concern for courier work, and they were to deliver them to L.A. where the new owners would pick them up. The idea of thirty pilots being paid $150,000 for delivering the planes seemed extreme until he checked into the cost-time estimates for shipping them up by sea. If it went off O.K., everyone would come out ahead. The entire flight should take slightly under three days. He stowed the kit away in the spaces provided and waited for the signal to taxi out. His plane was No. 26. Two thirteens, he thought. One for me, one for the medicine man.

Theirs was Echelon 9 and he was the center plane. The echelons flew 100 miles apart, sleeper below and watching wingmen fifty feet above and a hundred yards apart and behind. Since Alwa had, by agreement, spent the night up, he dropped into the sleeper's slot and the other two watched him as they sped northeast along the Uruguayan coast. The sun climbed on the right hand above the soft blue of the South Atlantic, picking out the shapes of container ships and small islands. Drifting cirrus clouds sailed above their flight.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Just after McKenney had checked in with Rio Control and obtained frontier crossing information and weather, his radio buzzed.

"Nine-Two, this is Nine-One, over?"

"Nine-Two, go ahead, Jack." Swift's plane was keeping perfect station on his port beam. Alwa, on autopilot, ground along, ahead.

"Pablo ... sorry about needling you back there...."

McKenney waited for him to go on, but he didn't. Hell with it.

"Forget it." He had the urge to add that Swift couldn't know about war because he'd never been to one, but he kept his mouth shut. It was his own damned fault for getting drunk and talking about it in the first place.

"No sweat," he added. But the details of the story: too disturbingly close, familiar. Coincidental. "The story, though. Was that true?"

"Oh yeah, Pablo. I swear. It's the local hot flying story at B.A. Surprised you hadn't heard it."

"Just like you told it?"

"Just like."

The planes pulsed along in silence: thirty planes, thirty pilots, one ghost — strung out in a thousand-mile line above the breakers. Atlantic Ocean on the right, savannah and jungle on the left, the sun above. He felt the quivering airframe, saw the instruments recording their information, the gently vibrating stick, the inert autopilot, the humming radio. Behind him the fuel sat, sloshing in its collapsible plastic bag, dribbling into the motor. First the collapsible, then the drop-tank, finally the plane's own supply. Wright R-1820 engine, 1,425 horsepower, maximum rated speed of 343 mph, though McKenney would never have pushed this one that high. It was too old, fit for crop-dusting, pilot training, but no speed rig. Besides, high speed eats up range. The octane supply was calculated too closely to play games with the throttle. He looked at the panel, saw the useless bomb-release switches on the right, the covered jettison for the drop-tank. The stick was standard, with no firing button, but there were a pair of tiny, empty brackets on the dash that had once held a Plexiglas target sight. He felt one with the plane; ex-warriors, the pair of them.

He glanced at Swift, who waved distantly in his bubble cockpit, then waggled his wings. McKenney returned the wave and flew on.

"McKenney," his colonel began. "We're seconding you to the Rhodesians. The Salisbury staff has asked Special Air for a consultant on C.I. and explosives. You're right for the job. It'll be a six-month appointment."

Captain Pablo McKenney stood to attention and replied, "Yessir."

"Now, there is no compulsion put on you to accept this posting. If you like, I can ask Tobey or Latimer or one of the others, but you are best qualified. You can have a few days to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

think on it if you like."

It was a deferential and, coming from the colonel, uncharacteristically kindly thing to say, and McKenney looked at his chief. But there was no weakness behind the bristling moustache and raw steel eyes. He had been paid a compliment.

And he had thought about it already. The Rhodesians were fighting Communists and Communism. It was a war of ideologies, and democracy had its back to the wall. This was what he had signed up to do.

"I'll go, sir."

The colonel took a long look at McKenney before saying coolly, "Very good, Captain. I'll direct the necessary orders to be prepared."

The Rhodesians gave him a major's commission and hazardous, meritorious and specialist's pay. He was seconded to a helicopter strike wing west of the Mozambique border, surrounded by barbed wire and tough black and white soldiers.

"Oh, it has nothing to do with race, Major," his aide remarked as they passed a company of engineers laying a revetment. White officer, black sergeant, mixed other ranks. "We're after the Reds, pure and simple."

"Um-hum."

"They're thick east of here, whole villages, even the children. We have atrocity photos you wouldn't believe...."

"Oh?" McKenney replied, smiling.

"What I mean, sir...."

"I know what you mean, Lieutenant," he said gently. "Carry on."

The problem was simple. How to wipe out a string of villages without leaving a trace, as the area was under an annoying amount of surveillance; U.N., Ceasefire Commission, even Amnesty International. Explosives were no good. Napalm was uneven and left too much evidence.

"The problem, then, is removing that evidence?"

Colonel Martenson nodded. "That's correct. Otherwise, we'll have FRELIMO agents taking pictures before the site cools."

"You can't take and hold the area?"

Martenson looked at him squarely and shook his head. "The villages are not on our side of the line."

"I see."

In the end, something he had read had turned the trick. He'd requisitioned a plane and flown to Capetown to confer with an officer he knew in the South African Navy. On the flight north, the plane had staggered into the air laden heavily with drums of cordite, a naval explosive with a burning temperature of 2,200°F. A company of Rhodesian engineers took a week to shred it into light, snowy strips. When he was ready, he explained the process. The colonels listened carefully, nodded and approved.

"You are to take the Fourteenth Airlanding Unit and carry out the destruction of the objectives we have code-named Coventry, Dresden, Hamburg, and Nagasaki. You are to carry

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out this operation personally, Major. It will be on your own initiative and responsibility. Do you understand?"

Of course, McKenney thought. If I screw up, it's my tail that will be fed to the wolves. But I won't screw up.

The six helicopters approached objective Coventry at dawn: four men in each ship, two pilots, a gunner and a bombardier. Pablo McKenney took the lead ship's second seat, calculating odds and second-guessing possibilities. He had seen the atrocity photos and his conscience was a quiet, blank slate. Anything he wrote on it today would be paying the FRELIMO back for those pictures.

The command pilot pointed ahead. A village, nestled in the curve of a river, subdued by the beginning of the day. They could make out the specks of women going to the river, people about the natural business of the day, black faces upturned at the approaching whine of the copters. The bombardier bent over his rotating drum.

"Why don't they run?"

"Don't know for sure what we're about, sir." The drums rotated, spinning pounds of shredded cordite into the air to fall like deadly gray snowflakes, blanketing the village. Some of the men readied weapons while curious children picked up the soft rain, wondering what trick this was. Mothers shrugged and sniffed the pungent explosive as the helicopters drew away. McKenney and the medicine man stood in the square, watching the deathfall.

"What trick is this, pilot?"

McKenney looked about in terror. The ground was gray, the huts, the forest, the people. It floated on the slowly moving river. The helicopters circled at a distance.

"I ... we must get away...."

"You are afraid, pilot. What is this soft gift that our children play with? What is this thing that smells of death, pilot major?"

McKenney watched the two helicopters move in, wondering which one he was in. He knew what was to happen. The old medicine man reached into his pouch and pulled forth a small box. McKenney shivered. Laughing negresses danced past him, blowing cordite chaff into the air.

"For meritorious and unnatural service beyond the call of sanity, we give you this." He hung the Rhodesian Medal of Honor around McKenney's neck, smiling serenely. "Welcome to Coventry."

The helicopters fired their flare charges and fled.

"Welcome to Hamburg."

The flares struck, the cordite spreading white hot at wildfire speed.

"Welcome to Dresden."

The negresses melted. The old man's features ran, his grinning teeth still speaking. The sun touched the earth.

"Welcome to Nagasaki."

Tossing in his seat, McKenney and his ghost flew on.

He shook off the terror and climbed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back into position, massaging his numb legs. Exquisite needles burned his flesh, blood returning to the extremities. He washed down a sandwich with lukewarm coffee, urinated in a plastic bag and sent it spinning toward the silver Brazilian beaches. The plane was responding well, the collapsible tank was emptying and, apart from the dream, he'd had no intimations of medicine men. Niteroi was coming up in the distance.

He reflected on the dream. It had shaken him badly. The medicine man was a disturbing addition, and McKenney'd said the haiku many times before he'd been able to regularize his breathing and relax. He determined to start attending temple again when he got to Los Angeles. Cleanse his soul while it was still his to work with.

"Nine-Two, Nine-Three, over. And over and over."

He looked towards the Indian's plane. He was stunting, doing easy barrel rolls.

"Kumar, go easy on that crate. You'll tear the wings off her."

"No chance, Pablo. She's a good, solid crate. Real first class. Sleep well? Any ghosts?"

"Dozens of them," McKenney grinned. Alwa's sense of humor was infectious and the dream had receded.

"Why they call you Pablo, digger?"

"It's my name."

"No."

"Yes. My father was an art teacher at Queensland College. Modern art. He named me after Pablo Picasso."

"That's pretty funny, Pablo."

"You think that's funny, you should meet my sister, Salvador...."

Alwa laughed and did a loop. After a while he settled down to watch Swift and McKenney. The latter, his spirits buoyed, sent his plane in gentle acrobatics about the sky while Alwa called encouragement.

It happened just an hour out of Fortaleza, flying in darkness with a falling barometer. Alwa tried to put his plane on auto and nothing happened. He checked it twice, trying to find a loose wire or a slipped linkage, but it was hopeless. The three planes huddled together as they flew deeper into the gathering storm.

"I can make it. I've got NoDoz tabs. If I get sleepy, I can sing to keep awake," Alwa said stubbornly.

"Forget it. You'll wind up in the Caribbean or on the side of some Mexican mountain," Swift replied. "Don't press your luck."

"My family is Kshatriya. We don't need luck."

"What?"

"Warrior caste," McKenney broke in. "Look, Kumar. Nothing will be accomplished by losing you or your plane..." He thought rapidly. "Jack, you're used to South American weather. How long are these storms likely to last?"

"Those Amazon bastards? Days. Whoever planned this flight didn't take that into account. As long as we can

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

keep ahead of it, we'll be O.K., but if it scoops us up, or forms around us.... Well, I'm glad I'm not in Echelon 10."

"Right. So we can't stop then?"

"No, not safely."

"So what do I do?" Alwa sounded miserable.

"We'll be coming up on Belém in two hours. Land there. You'll have an hour to fix the trouble and pick up with Echelon 10. Jack and I will head on. We can sleep four on, four off, if we have to."

"Right," Swift said enthusiastically, his voice crackling as distant lightning played across the airwaves. "And Belém Airport has a good repair facility. You've got to, man. You can't last without sleep."

"What if the storm catches me on the ground?"

"If it catches you, it'll catch 10. You can team up and start off when it clears. But we can't keep six planes down there. The owners will have a fit. It's the best we can do...."

"All right. Damn, I'm sorry...."

"Forget it."

They flew on, racing the storm.

Alwa fell away over Belém as Swift and McKenney turned west across the jungle on a straight leg toward Georgetown, trying to eat up miles before all hell broke loose. Parsons, the leader of Echelon 10, had promised to attempt to pickup on Alwa at Belém. His voice was weak with electrical static, and thunder dressed the background of the transmission. Twice the voice faded and, after the second time, it was gone.

Thunderstorms began to cut them off from the sea beaches and their string of refuge villages, and the jungle below was darkening gray-green, undulating with the rising wind. The storm was not so much chasing them as it was forming all along the northeast coast, erupting new storms in their path, lowering the ceiling. Rain began to streak the cockpit.

"Can we go above it?"

Swift's plane was appearing and disappearing in the clouds. "No chance ... too high...."

"Then take it down on the deck, in case we have to set down."

"...down? Where? There's nothing but ... miles of jungle ... there...."

Lightning flashed, searing the cockpit with white blindness, and McKenney felt an instant of eyes on his neck. He turned wildly but there was nothing in the rear seat but the nearly empty fuel bag. Lightning flickered again. He could no longer see Swift's plane.

"Nine-One, come in."

Nothing.

"Nine-One. Swift, come in. Swift!"

He scanned the sky, trying to see the little silver plane against the lowering clouds. Just once he thought he caught a glimpse of a shape, silhouetted in lightning, but it was gone the moment it registered. Fighting the turbulence, he struggled to bring the craft down.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Wildly boiling jungle and the reflection of lightning on rivers was all he could see as he skimmed across the landscape, an endless expanse of uninhabited rain forest, lashed by the rain. Nowhere was there a clearing or a village.

He was searching the horizon when a flash drew his eye to the mirror. It was a face: brown, stern, mocking and watching. He whirled in his seat, the trainer yawing in response, but again there was nothing. He laughed wildly, pressing his back into the seat, his eyes on the mirror as he hurtled through the dark, waiting for the next flash of lightning. Sweat began to form on his face.

When it came, the face was there. McKenney froze. He did not turn.

"What do you want from me?" he hissed.

There was a sound halfway between the beat of rain on the fuselage and the whisper of the radio. "Pilot majerrrr...."

I am not insane. I will not be afraid, he thought. The plane is haunted. I have seen stranger things in Africa, in Australia among the abos. He did not look back but the face stayed in the mirror. Trees flew by under his wings.

Calmly, he pulled back on the stick to give himself more clearance, fighting the distancing effect. His mind struggled to disbelieve while he fought to stay in control of his reflexes, of the plane. The 28's engine labored. He sat still, in silence, as they strained toward the borders of Guyana. After a time, it spoke.

"You are a hero, Pilot Major? You have killed many men?" The voice was holed, skeletal, like a net.

"I have killed men, women, and children, and I am not a hero. Why do you torment me?"

"Because I am here. This is my funeral place. I am waiting for my funeral pyre."

The final burning the soldiers had interrupted. He watched the forest howling past, just beneath his drop-tank, a highly explosive aviation-gasoline bomb. The plastic collapsible was nearly empty. He poised his hand over the three-way toggle that would switch his fuel supply to the belly reserve.

"If we crash, will the plane burn?" The ghost's voice was a fingernail on a blackboard.

"We won't crash," McKenney said firmly.

"Yes, you are a good pilot. You have killed many people."

"Shut up!" The ghost was silent. McKenney breathed harshly, watching the dark, unbroken jungle in his landing lights. He hadn't remembered turning them on. He reached for the switch, then stopped. Better to see what he was flying over, just in case. The engine coughed. The collapsible was dry.

"We crash now?"

"No. I switch fuel tanks. You do what you damned well please, just leave me alone." He flipped the toggle to feed the drop-tank. The engine continued to cough. He snapped the toggle

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back and forth but nothing happened.

"Damn."

"Trouble?"

"The drop-tank is jammed, blocked," he growled, worrying about the toggle, cursing the god of machines and mechanics.

"Switch to the wing tanks."

"I can't, not as long as I'm carrying the drop-tank. I'll have to jettison...."

The engine sputtered.

"If you jettison, you will not be able to complete your flight...." the apparition sighed, mocking.

"If I don't, it'll end right here." He tore the cover off the jettison switch, but something stopped his hand an inch from the release. "No. We shall crash. I shall have my pyre."

McKenney tore at the terrible weight that covered him, the blood pounding in his ears as he fought for control of the plane. His vision dimmed, all sound but the beating of his heart fading as it seemed to slow, to compress time, making the progress of his will toward the switch like the forcing of a fist through molten steel. With a crash, the engine stopped.

Silence.

"No!" He lunged forward, breaking the medicine man's grip. The plane bucked upward as the tank fell away, the windmilling propeller trying to catch life as fuel from the wing tanks surged into the engine. And then he saw the village.

It was a circle of stilted huts around a council house. Pigs ran in terror, chickens scattering among the cultivated rows of plants. The trees reached up for him. A man stood silhouetted in the door, backlit by a glowing council fire. And then the village was gone, the plane tearing downward, trying vainly to recover speed. There was a soft crump, and light flared up behind him.

Heat and leaping flames.

The drop-tank.

McKenney opened his mouth to scream as the trees tore off his wings and his landing lights went out. Hard and wet, the impact pinned him to the cockpit.

Welcome to Coventry, came the final thought.

It was lighter, for the sky had partially cleared and he could see. The trainer was engine-deep in mud, wingless, ruined. He tried to move but there was no feeling in his legs. His back was broken. He saw, rather than felt the water swirling around his boots, heard the cries of animals, smelled the dripping gasoline, tasted blood and broken teeth.

"Are you satisfied, old man?" he rasped. There was no answer. He looked out through the swamp. Ahead of him was an immense, cruciform tree. Around the base, dark-skinned men and women were beginning to gather.

Alwa sat, face down, brooding, staring at his shoes. Outside of the receptionist, he was alone in the lounge. The door opened.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How is he?"

Swift shrugged, looking miserable. "I don't know. They don't know. Catatonia, amnesia, hysterical paralysis. I can't understand it. 12,000 miles in the air, perfect landing, taxis into the parking slot and has to be hauled out of the plane like a zombie."

"He hasn't responded at all?"

Swift shook his head, lost. "I shouldn't have told him that story. If I hadn't told him that story, maybe this wouldn't have happened, I don't know, but he was fine the whole flight. First rate. Damn."

Alwa rose and took his arm. "It's not your fault. It's nobody's fault. He was in the war or something, true?"

"Yeah, I guess he was."

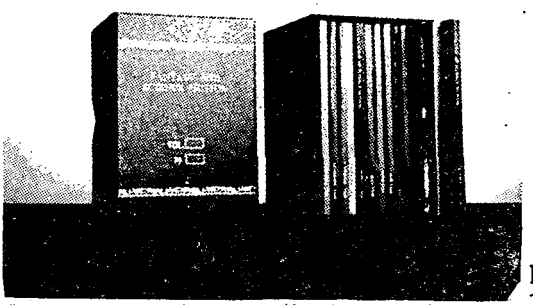
Alwa grabbed his coat. "You know Los Angeles. Let's get some breakfast. We can look in on him later this afternoon."

"O.K."

They headed for the door, heels clicking softly on the waxed floor.

"Kumar, how much do you know about Coventry?"

"It's an English town, yes?"



Handsome, Sturdy

VOLUME FILES

for Your Copies of

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Each Volume File will keep 12 copies of FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION clean, orderly, and readily accessible. Sturdily built, the files are covered with a rich black and red washable leatherette, and the lettering is in 16-carat gold leaf.
Reasonably priced at $5.95 each, 3 for $17.00 or 6 for $30.00, they are shipped fully postpaid on a money back basis if not satisfactory. Order direct from:

JESSE JONES BOX CORPORATION
Dept. F&SF P.O. Box 5120 Philadelphia, Pa. 19141

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Richard Cowper's most recent story here was "What Did the Deazies Do?" (December 1982); the story below concerns a soldier on leave, the homecoming of a hero...

Brothers

BY

RICHARD COWPER

The coach was late. Tammy and I had been waiting in the pool of shade beneath Marker Oak for the better part of an hour when we saw old Mr. Dorian plodding down the road towards us driving two heifers. I called out to ask him what time it was.

"'Lo, Roger," he said. "'Lo, young Tammy. Bus late agin, is she?"

"What time is it, please, Mr. Dorian?"

He fumbled inside his jacket, pulled out an ancient digital timeteller by means of the bootlace which he kept fastened to it, and squinted down. The heifers gazed at us with their huge mild eyes, and breathed softly through their moist pink noses. "Half past three, I make her," said Mr. Dorian. "Meeting someone, are you?"

"Bobby's coming home on leave today," said Tammy.

"Is that so?" said Mr. Dorian. "Home on leave, eh? Don't seem no time since he went away."

"Fifteen months," I said. "All but a week."

"Is that so? As long as that, eh? And how long is he home for?"

"Seven days," I said.

One of the heifers arched its tail and poured a liquid splodge into the gray dust of the roadway. Mr. Dorian restored his timeteller to its pocket, nodded to us, and prodded the animals into movement. "I daresay you won't have much longer to wait," he said. "'Bye f'now."

We watched him till he disappeared from our sight down the lane that led towards the river, then I climbed up on the dry-stone wall, shaded my eyes from the August glare, and peered down the valley.

Far off where the blue hills folded in upon each other I glimpsed a sudden

Copyright © 1983 by Richard Cowper

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bright flicker as the sun's reflection winked from a distant windscreen. "There's something coming!" I called.

"Is it him?"

"Too far to tell."

Tammy scrambled up beside me. "Where?" she demanded.

I pointed towards the distant hills and she screwed up her eyes. I could just make out the faint plume of white dust but she had no doubts at all. "It's the Unicorn," she said.

"You can't see that!"

"*You* can't," she said, and she jumped off the wall on the opposite side from the road where she squatted down behind a clump of choker weed and had a pee — something she always seemed to have to do when she was excited.

But she was right about the coach. When it drew up at Marker Oak about ten minutes later, the gold unicorn emblem on its side was right there in front of my nose. I didn't pay much attention to it though and neither did she. We were both watching the door. It hissed open at last and there was Bobby. He waved to us, chucked a canvas hold-all into my arms, then turned and said something to the driver. I stared up at his dark blue uniform with its gold dagger flash and the S.S.C. initials, and I felt a sort of tightness inside my chest as though my heart was swelling up with pride and might burst at any second.

Bobby jumped down into the road and grinned at us. "Hey, you've sprouted, kids!" he cried, punching me lightly on the chest with one hand and giving one of Tammy's braids a jerk with the other.

"You, too," I said. "Could be the uniform, though."

"And the haircut," said Tammy.

The door thumped shut, the driver honked his horn, and the coach pulled away with a few pale-faced passengers peering down curiously at the three of us standing there in what must have seemed like the middle of nowhere.

Bobby. Robert James Harkecz, Private First Class. Nineteen years old. Six years older than me; ten years older than Tammy. "Wild" Bobby, our brother; object of my hero worship since the days when I had first crawled off in vain pursuit of him around the kitchen floor. Bobby, back home on his first furlough, a boy no longer. He stretched his arms wide, drew in a deep breath and gave an exaggerated sniff. "Phew! Ripe cowshit! That's home sweet home, all right!"

Our house was over a mile from Marker Oak. It stood by itself on the outskirts of the village which Dad was fond of saying was "on the direct route from nowhere to nowhere," and where, for the last twenty-five years, he earned his living as headmaster of the local school. His pupils were drawn mainly from the farms which were scattered up and down the valley. Most of the children became farmers or farmer's wives in their turn and eventually sent their own children to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

school. There was sense of continuity in the process which was not unlike the slow circuit of the seasons. Out there, beyond the valley, was that other world image we saw flickering on our So-Vi screens. From time to time we even ventured out into it, only to return thankfully vowing that there was no place like home. All of us except Bobby, that is.

Bobby was a law unto himself; he did things his own way. When he was a boy of fourteen he set his heart to owning a motorbike, but Dad said not until he was sixteen and had taken his matric. So Bobby went ahead and built one for himself out of odd bits and pieces he'd salvaged round about. He built it in Mr. Hammar's workshop while he was earning himself pocket money helping Mr. Hammar, who was by way of being our local blacksmith-cum-motor-mechanic. When the bike was finished Bobby rode it in triumph through the village and around the school playground. Dad came out to see what all the racket was and nearly had a heart attack on the spot. I believe he thought Bobby had stolen the machine somewhere.

When he discovered the truth, Dad's way of coming to terms with this act of filial rebellion was to decide that Bobby was a natural-born engineer who would go to the university and take a first-class degree in engineering. Perhaps he was right and Bobby *was* a natural engineer, but Dad always tended to look at things through his schoolmaster's spectacles and he and Bobby didn't see exactly eye to eye on this one. Bobby got his matric, all right, because he had a mind as quick as a silverfish and a memory like a magnet, but two-thirds of the way through his university entrance course he went off the boil.

He had got a proper bike by then (Dad had kept his promise and bought it for him as a reward for getting his matric), and he used to roar off on his own in the evenings and sometimes not get back until the cocks were crowing.

There was a girl called Mary Helso who had gone soft on him when he was still just a kid at school, and it seems he used to make a habit of picking her up on his bike and driving off with her into the Plains towns. The first we knew about it was when Mr. Helso turned up late one evening and shut himself up in the sitting room with Dad and Mum. He talked very loud, though, and the things I heard him saying about Bobby weren't at all polite. Dad stuck up for Bobby and gave as good as he got, till in the end Mr. Helso quieted down and said he'd just thought that Mum and Dad ought to know what their son was getting up to, and that the one thing he could tell them for sure was that Bobby wasn't going to get up to it anymore with *his* daughter, not if he, Bill Helso, knew anything about it! Then they all had a drink and Dad said he'd speak to Bobby as soon as maybe.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After Mr. Helso had gone I climbed out of my bedroom window and ran down the road towards Marker Oak to try and intercept Bobby on his way home. Luckily it was one of his earlier nights and it wasn't too long before I heard his bike in the distance. When I saw the headlight coming I stood in the middle of the lane and jumped up and down waving my arms. He pulled up just in front of me and said: "What in hell's name do you think you're playing at, Rog?"

I told him what I'd overheard.

He listened to me in silence. When I'd finished, all he said was: "The stupid bloody cow."

"Who? Bill Helso?" I asked.

Bobby just sort of snorted and told me to climb up behind him and to hold on tight.

He dropped me off by the outhouses so that I could climb up into my bedroom by way of the lean-to roof, and then he put his bike away. I saw a downstairs light go on and guessed that Dad had been waiting up.

I don't know what Dad said to him. I asked Bobby as soon as I had a chance, but he just winked at me and said he'd tell me when my balls dropped. I don't think he meant to be hurtful — it was just his way — but it couldn't have stung worse if he'd slapped me across the face.

Whatever it was Dad had said, it seemed to have an effect. For the next six months Bobby worked harder at his studies than he'd ever worked in his life. It was almost as though he'd set out to prove something to himself. From time to time letters used to come for him addressed in a sort of round schoolgirly hand, but I don't think he ever answered them. Some of them I don't think he even bothered to open. I'd never known Mary Helso very well — she was a lot senior to me — but I couldn't help feeling a bit sorry for her. I doubt if Bobby ever thought about her at all.

In the spring he went off to the university to take his entrance exam. He was away for five days. When he got back Dad held an elaborate postmortem on all his papers, alternately groaning and applauding. Bobby just grinned in that strange one-sided way he so often favored when he was talking to Dad, as though he was laughing inside himself at some joke he couldn't bear to share with anyone.

Bobby was out when the letter with the results came. It was addressed to "Robert J. Harkecz" and had the university crest printed on the top left-hand corner. It lay there on the hall table like an unexploded bomb while we tiptoed around it and none of us dared to open it. I was sent out to try to locate Bobby, but I guessed he was probably twenty miles away making up for lost time with some new Mary Helso, so I didn't look very hard.

He turned up just in time for supper and seemed surprised that no one had opened the letter. "What does it matter who opens it?" he said. "The results won't be any different." And with that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

flipped the letter across to Tammy, who was so overcome she promptly dropped it.

When finally we got it open and learnt that he had passed well up in the second grade, we all broke into wild applause. Dad unlocked the sideboard and poured out two slivos for himself and Bobby and glasses of wine for the rest of us. It was as much his moment of triumph as anyone's, and he was just about to launch himself into some sort of a speech when Bobby held up a finger and stopped him. "You're happy, Dad?" he asked.

"I'm absolutely delighted, Bobby."

"It's what you wanted?"

"Of course, of course."

"Even though it isn't first grade?"

"That's immaterial. We'll make up the difference somehow. You won't go short on your grant, I promise you."

"Don't worry about that, Dad. It won't be necessary."

I looked from Bobby to Dad and back again wondering what this was all about. I felt a sort of sick tenseness inside me and a strange, fearful apprehension for Dad, who was still smiling a sort of vacant, puzzled smile as he said: "I don't follow you, Bobby."

Bobby looked down at the glass of slivo he was holding. "It's just that I shan't be taking up my place."

We all stared at him and Dad croaked "*What?*" as though his mouth was full of soot or something.

Bobby raised his head and glanced around at Mum and Tammy and me. Then he turned back to Dad. "Your boy's joined the army," he said. "Cheers!" And he raised his glass and drank the spirit off as though it was milk.

I never really did understand why Dad took it the way he did — I mean, it's not as though Bobby had done something *wrong*. After all, every country has to *have* an army. The president of our own country's a general. And so was the one before him. Engineers never get to be president of their country. Besides, they're always telling us on the So-Vi what a great life it is in the army and how all the girls go crazy when they see a uniform. I suppose Dad was just being old-fashioned because he'd set his heart on Bobby being a professor or something. But there's no getting away from the fact that he was pretty badly upset. Not that he could do anything about it (Bobby was over eighteen by then), but he had a sort of cold, stunned look for a long time afterwards, even after Bobby had left.

We had a few letters from him (well, cards mostly), but he never said much. He did his initial training hundreds of miles away in the south. We expected he'd be home for Christmas, but in October he wrote that he'd been offered a transfer into the Special Service Corps, which meant another three months' intensive training followed by a spell of routine attachment. The S.S.C. is the one they always show you on the So-Vi with men leaping out of those black helicopters and firing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their lasers from the hip as they charge off into the smoke of battle.

They say that all S.S.C. men are handpicked for their super intelligence. They're also supposed to be totally fearless and as tough as armor plate. When they have the big anniversary parade in the capital it's always the S.S.C. who form the guard of honor for the president. They really are the best — everyone says so — and naturally I was pretty excited that Bobby had been selected, and I didn't lose any time bragging about it to the other kids at school.

Then one day Dad called me into his office and told me he didn't want me to go round sounding off about Bobby quite so much, and that reflected glory wasn't worth the having since you yourself hadn't done anything to earn it. It struck me that he felt sort of *ashamed* of Bobby in some way, and I told him so straight out.

He shook his head. "That's not true, Roger," he said. "If I'm ashamed of anyone I'm ashamed of myself. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have spoken to you like this. Try and forget I ever said it." And he smiled at me and patted my shoulder and let me go. And that was all there was to it except that afterwards I didn't shoot my mouth off quite so much about Bobby. I don't really know why.

In August, Bobby wired to say he was coming home on a week's leave and that he'd be arriving the next day. Typically, it was the first we'd heard of it. Tammy and I spent all the morning polishing up his motorbike ready for him, and then we went down to Marker Oak to meet the coach, which is where I began telling you all this.

As the three of us were walking back up the road where I'd once waylaid him in the middle of the night, I asked him if he remembered it. He laughed and said he hadn't forgotten, then he changed the subject and began questioning Tammy about school and how things had been in the village since he went away. I was dying to ask him a whole load of stuff about what it was really like in the S.S.C., but no sooner did I put a direct question to him than he dodged around it or just shrugged and said he found it all too boring to think about — which seemed a pretty ridiculous thing to say. Finally it struck me that possibly he didn't want to talk about it in front of Tammy, so I let the subject drop till I could get hold of him on his own.

At supper that night it came out that the reason Bobby had got this leave was that he'd been selected to go on an officers' training course. When Dad heard this he brightened up immediately and said that must mean Bobby could opt for the engineers and be able to collect his degree at the government's expense. I thought Bobby might take the opportunity to put Dad down again, but all he said was that he couldn't apply to specialize till he'd got through his Part One, which might take six months.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Even so, I think Dad looked happier than he had done since the day Bobby broke the news about joining the army, and later, when Bobby had gone off on his bike to look up some old friends, I heard Dad say to Mum that it seemed as if everything might be working out better than he'd dared to hope.

It wasn't till the third full day of his leave that I got Bobby to myself. Someone he knew had given him two passes for a day's fishing up at Lake Varna, and he invited me to go with him. I didn't need asking twice. Tammy pulled a long face and said why couldn't we borrow Dad's car and all go, but Bobby said he'd only got just the two passes and that they wouldn't let anyone in who hadn't got one. He promised her we'd all go out somewhere before he went back.

Varna's up in the hills about fifteen miles north of our village. They built a dam there across the river years before the Revolution and then stocked the lake up with fish. Everyone thought it was going to be a people's recreation center, but somehow it got taken over by the government and made into a sporting reserve for high-ranking party members and their pals. Bobby never did say how he'd managed to get hold of those two passes.

We left on his bike straight after breakfast and were there in about half an hour, which is pretty good going when you consider how the road twists and turns. We motored in past a big signboard which said GOVERNMENT PROPERTY. KEEP OUT, and then pulled up outside the lodge. A warden came out and Bobby handed him the passes and showed him his S.S.C. identity card. The warden glanced at me, grinned, and then told us we could drive on round to the landing stage on the far side of the lake and borrow one of the rowing boats which were tied up there. "Any fish under half a kilo you put back," he said. "Good luck."

The sun hadn't yet had a chance to do more than just thin out the mist on the lake. There was no breeze at all and the pale green water was as flat as a looking glass. When Bobby switched off the engine and my ears had stopped ringing I felt the stillness of the place creeping in on me like a sort of spell, and I think I would almost have believed him if he'd told me that we were the only two people left alive in the whole world. Then I heard the *plop!* of the rising fish, and that brought me back to my senses again. We sorted out our tackle, laid the rods in one of the boats, and then Bobby took the oars, rowed us quietly into the middle of the lake, and we began to fish.

Dad used to say that you know you've been truly happy only after it's all over — when it's happening you're so wrapped up in what you're doing you don't have any time left in which to realize how happy you are. I can see what he meant, all right, but even so I'll swear I *knew* I was as happy as I'll ever be out there fishing on Varna Lake

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with Bobby that golden morning in August. At that moment, if I could have arranged to stop the world like a clock, I think I'd have been quite prepared to do it.

We caught seven fish between us — two of them over the kilo mark — and then the sun began to quiver like a brass gong, and the trout lost interest in anything we had to offer them and sought the shady depths. We rowed up and down for a while, then made our way back to the jetty and had an early lunch of the sandwiches which Mum had packed up for us. After that we stripped off our shirts and stretched ourselves out on the warm planks of the landing stage. Even today I have only to catch a faint sniff of the aroma of ancient creosote to be transported back there again.

Suddenly I noticed a pink scar running diagonally across Bobby's left shoulder blade. "Hey! How did you get that?" I demanded.

"How did I get what?"

"That scar on your back."

"Oh, that. On A.S."

"What's A.S., Bobby?"

"Active Service."

I sat up and stared at him. "Really? What sort of active service?"

Bobby opened one eye, looked at me, and then closed it again. "Go on," I said. "You can tell me, Bobby. I promise I won't say a word to anyone."

He gave a brief snort of a laugh.

"I swear," I said desperately. "I'll swear by anything you like."

His eye opened again and surveyed me. "What's it matter?" he said. "I'm the one who's got it, not you."

"But I want to *know*," I pleaded. "Why won't you tell me? It's not as if I'm Tammy. I'm your brother. You know I won't tell if you don't want me to. *Please*, Bobby."

There was a long silence.

"*Please*," I implored.

"All right," he said at last. "On one condition."

"Yes?"

"You'll bite your tongue off before you tell anyone else."

"Cross my heart," I said.

"So what do you want to know?"

"How it happened," I said, pointing to his shoulder.

"I told you. On A.S."

"But what sort of A.S.?"

"A culling."

"A what?"

"An urban A.T. mission."

My eyes widened. "What's that mean, Bobby?"

"It means killing slummies," he said.

"Killing who?"

"Slummies. Terrorists."

"You've done *that?*"

"I've done that."

"I never heard about it."

Bobby said nothing.

"It wasn't on the news or in the papers, was it?"

"Ah, shit, Rog. You're still living in fairyland. Why don't you grow up?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What do you mean?"

He heaved himself up on one elbow, reached into the pocket of his tunic jacket, and pulled out a packet of those thin, black cigarettes which he had taken to smoking. He lit one and dropped the spent match into the water through a crack in the boards. Then he fished out a pair of dark silvery glasses and put them on. They really did alter his appearance, made his face look *thinner* somehow. All at once he seemed years older. I didn't even know if he was looking at me or not.

"What happened, Bobby?" I said. "Did they attack you?"

"That's right."

"Well, go on. Tell me about it. From the beginning."

He turned over onto his back so that I couldn't see the scar anymore, and he let the smoke sort of dribble out of the corners of his mouth. "From November to February we were stuck in a camp at Porto," he said. "We were learning what A.T. was all about. 'Selective training,' they called it. They were the toughest three months of my whole life. My section was in the charge of Sarko — Sergeant Instructor Sarkonovitch — Sonofabitch Sarkonovitch. That bugger knows every dirty trick there is to know, and what he doesn't know he invents. One day he gave us a demonstration lecture on 'Interrogation procedures.' ... Bobby paused, took a long, thoughtful pull at his cigarette, and then said: "Well, anyway, at the end of those three months our class was down to two-thirds. One of the lads was dead, two were in hospital, and five had just copped out because they couldn't take anymore. The rest of us were passed as ready for active service and sent off to join different regular units.

"I hadn't been with mine for more than a week when who should show up but Sarko. There was a rumor about Sarko being temporarily relieved of his post as instructor because there was an inquiry pending on the kid who'd been killed on exercise, but I think he'd volunteered just to get back into the action. Talking about killing slummies just wasn't good enough for him. He needed the real thing. A true professional." Bobby twisted his head towards me so that I suddenly saw the blue sky reflected in his glasses like twin silver-rimmed puddles. "Ah, hell, Rog," he said. "You don't want to hear all this crap."

"But I do! I do!" I cried. "Go on. What happened?"

His head sank back. "What happened?" he repeated. "Ajaka's what happened."

I vaguely recalled having heard something on the news, but I couldn't remember what it was. In those days that sort of political stuff didn't interest me very much. But of course I knew that Ajaka had been the provincial capital of the old industrial area in the south before the provinces were all abolished after the Revolution. Now it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was just another of the old decaying Plains cities with a poverty problem — a name you marked in on your sketch map for a geography test, and then crossed your fingers and hoped you'd got it right.

"Wasn't someone shot there?" I said. "A general or something."

"Colonel Parathos, the chief of the secret police. He wasn't shot, though. He was blown up."

"By terrorists?"

"That's right."

"And you had to go in and get them?"

"We were given the job of sorting out the mess after the S.P. had gone and ballsed everything up."

"How did you do that?"

Bobby took his half-smoked cigarette out of his mouth and flipped it away into the water. "We wiped them out," he said.

"The terrorists?"

"Who else, dummy?"

"How many of them were there?"

"A couple of thousand."

I laughed. "Seriously, how many?"

Again his head turned towards me and those strange, empty-sky eyes regarded me blankly. "I told you," he said. "About two thousand."

"*Two thousand terrorists?*" I simply couldn't believe it. I don't suppose the whole population of our valley comes to much more than two thousand. It just didn't make sense.

"It was a major op," he said. "It lasted for five days. We sealed off the whole of the old market quarter and smoked them out street by street. Our orders were total elimination. No prisoners. They called it an 'Urban sterilization exercise.' "

By then I knew he was pulling my leg because he said it all so matter-of-fact — just like he used to when he was kidding me back in the old days. So I played right along with him in the way I'd always tried to do once I'd spotted what he was up to. "I expect Sergeant Sarko was pretty happy," I said.

"Oh, yes, Sarko loved every minute of it," said Bobby. "'Specially the Preskar Tower. That was really the best. Forty-eight stories high. They dropped us onto the top of it from two choppers, and we went right down through it to the bottom, floor by floor. It took us a whole day. We killed a hundred and seventy-five. Thirty-eight of them were scored by Sarko."

I giggled. "He *counted* them?"

"He lugged them," said Bobby.

"He what?"

With the forefinger of his right hand Bobby made a slicing motion down the back of his right ear. "Off," he said.

"And Alkanian cows all have six legs," I retorted.

"You don't believe me?"

"*Believe you!* What do you take me for? Nobody does things like that! It's ... it's not...." But I couldn't find the word I wanted.

"It's the truth," he said. "Every S.S.C. trooper's done it. It's the only

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sure way to establish a head count. Most of the bodies get blown up or burnt."

"But you're in the S.S.C.," I said.

"So?"

"But *you've* never done that."

"No?"

I stared at him and then I lunged out and snatched off his glasses. "You *liār!*" I laughed. "Bobby Harkecz, you really are the biggest, most awful bloody liar in the whole universe!"

"And you're the world's biggest fool."

"Well, at least I'm not fool enough to believe *your* lies," I said. " 'Lugging'! Why didn't you make it 'cocking' while you were at it?"

"Because women don't have cocks, old son. But they all have ears!"

"Women," I cried, launching myself at him and pummeling his bare chest with my fists. "Aren't you forgetting the babies? The ones with the lasers hidden in their nappies? What about them?"

He gripped my wrists and held me like an iron vice (I had forgotten just how fit and strong he was). Then, in one easy movement, he sat up and deposited me flat on my back on the boards at his side. "You want to know how I got my scar?" he said, leaning over me. "So I'll tell you, sonny boy. A kid of about your age did it with a long-handled billhook. She was hiding in beside a door when I kicked it in. If it hadn't been for my webbing she'd have had my arm off. Sarko blew her to bits ten seconds later. You don't believe me?"

I knew he was telling the truth and I said so, but by then he wanted something more than that from me. Still holding me down with one hand, he reached back into his tunic jacket and pulled out the wallet which held his identity card. He let go of my wrist and thrust the wallet into my hand. "Undo the zip," he said.

Wondering what was coming, I did as he told me and then held out the wallet to him.

He shook his head. "Take out what's in the pocket."

I dipped in my fingers and drew out a small sealed envelope of milky, opaque plastic. It measured about three inches by two.

"Open it."

I looked at it and then I looked up at him.

"Open it," he repeated.

"It's a joke," I thought, squeezing the envelope between my finger and thumb. "He's been leading up to this all the way along. He's planned it all out just to see how big a fool he can make out of me. It's a French letter, that's what it is." And grinning I pulled free the tongue of the envelope and shook its contents out into my cupped palm.

It could perhaps have been a scrap of honey-brown chamois leather, but for the tiny hole which someone had pierced through the softly rounded lobe to hold a missing eardrop. Where the sounds of life had once throbbed

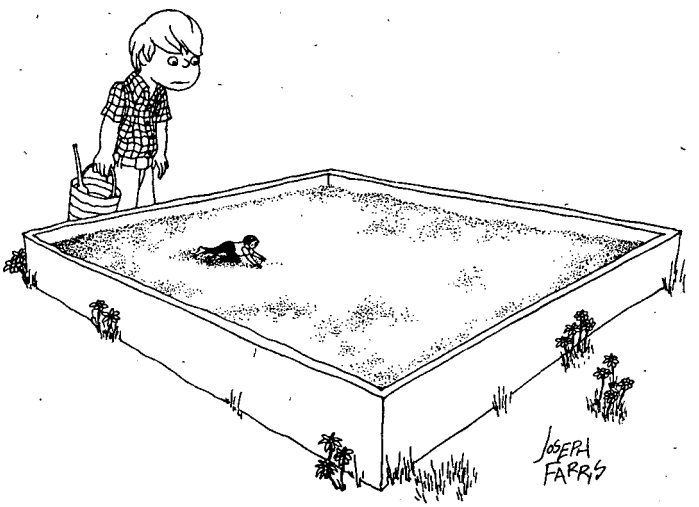
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down through warm coils of convoluted darkness there was now nothing but a ragged vacancy framing the pink criss-cross of lines in the center of my palm. I stared and stared at it while a huge smothering tide of shame and anguish rose choking within my breast. I felt as if God's finger was pointing down at me and that pitiful little morsel of a never-to-be-lived life was silently accusing me of having connived at all the savagery and heartache in a world gone mad. As the hot tears blinded me and I buried my face in the cradle of my own arms, all I could manage was to blubber: *"But it's Tammy's! It's Tammy's!"*

Just why Bobby should have chosen so brutal a way of ripping open the chrysalis of my childhood and dragging me out into his "real" world I never did discover, but it has occurred to me more than once that what he did to me then must have been at least as important for him as it was for me. Maybe he saw it as a sort of symbolic cutting of the cord that joined us both — the link of my need for him. Or perhaps he just felt a compulsion to unburden himself of the things he had seen and done. Or maybe he was simply sick to death of being anyone's hero, even mine. To be honest, I'm not sure that *he* knew why he'd done it. Neither of us has ever spoken of it again from that day to this.

Bobby is a lieutenant now. This summer I shall sit for my finals in agricultural science. Tammy is engaged to a farmer.

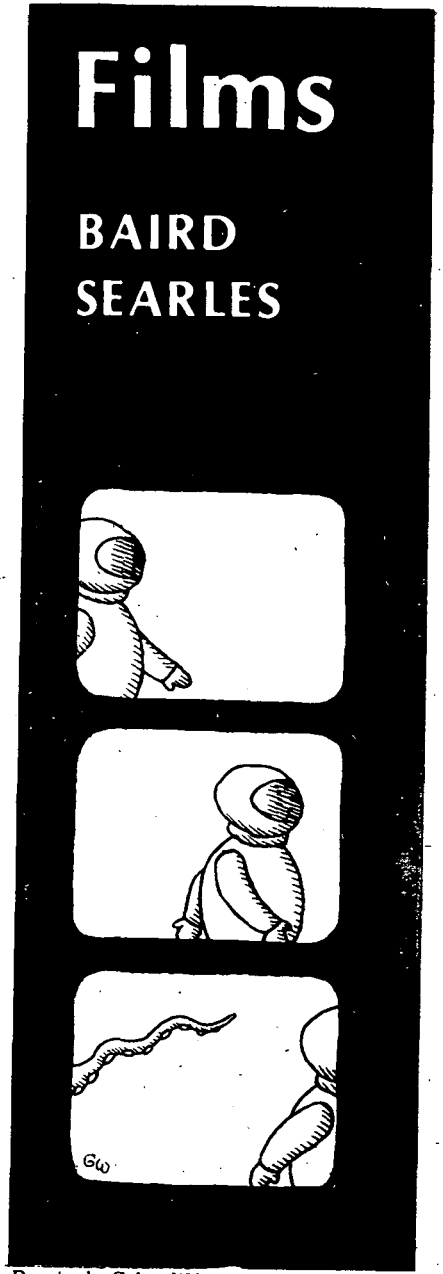
All this happened long ago, and in another country.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Films

BAIRD SEARLES



Drawing by Gahan Wilson

TUBE OR NOT TUBE

The tube is going off in so many directions these days that one needs the eyes of a hydra to keep up. What with video cassettes, video discs, the endless spawning of cable and satellite TV (not to mention the varied stuff that can be put on the computer monitor and game screen), broadcast television, which was almost the only game in town a decade ago, is losing ground rapidly. The fragmentation makes for a certain amount of frustration — for the general viewer, since unless you are immensely rich, have nothing else to do, and live in the right place, there is literally no way you can see everything — and for the reviewer, since one has to guess at what percentage of one's readers will have access to what's being written about. Where does reviewing leave off and reportage begin?

Broadcast TV is still the commonest factor (in more ways than one), and so we might as well take some space to look back over the season so far and the various entries in fantasy and s/f. One obvious trend was the lack of space opera; what science fiction we got is what might be called "domestic s/f," i.e. that which does not need elaborate sets, costumes, or effects. The result was a lack of almost anything of interest, visual or otherwise.

Take *The Powers of Matthew Star;* (Please, to quote Hennie Youngman.) This might be described as E.T. as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hunk, since it's also about a young alien, stranded on this backward globe. But this one has got Sex Appeal, which even E.T.'s most fervent admirers will have to admit was something he just didn't have. (At least I hope so — for all I know, today's adolescents are so sexually jaded that it takes something that looks like that to turn them on.)

Anyhow, Matthew Star has been brought here as a child from the planet Quadris; he's really a prince or the Quadrisanian equivalent, and he and the faithful retainer who brought him here were fleeing an invasion of Really Awful people. Matthew and Old Faithful have been moving around ever since, for fear the baddies will find him, and as the series opens, they indeed have. You can tell they are wicked aliens because they do not use contractions when they talk.

Now we don't need the title of the series to tell us that Matthew has Powers. Since all he wants to do is finish a year of high school in one place and get to know the girl next door well enough to carry her hockey pucks home from school, he decides he's not going to be pushed around any more and will use his Powers to stay and fight.

Like all such TV Powers, Matthew's are summoned by staring intently (there's a new section in the actor's handbook devoted to "expressions denoting the evocation of psychic phenomena"), thereby stopping, starting, raising, breaking, mending, short-circuiting, or otherwise meddling with whatever is presenting the problems.

That's enough about Matthew Star, I think. Since everyone concerned seems genial enough, and the whole thing is a harmless exercise in mindlessness, let's just gently say that this is an idea whose time has went.

Much more interesting was a dramatization of Mark Twain's posthumously-published novel *The Mysterious Stranger* which appeared on PBS. It's a novel I haven't read (not many have, I gather), but judging from the teleplay, it's pretty strange.

A 19th century printer's devil (apprentice) dreams himself back to Austria in the period just after the invention of printing, finding himself in the equivalent position then. Another adolescent appears, apparently a vagabond, who is also taken on in the printshop; the first indication that he is something other than he seems is when he announces that his name is Number 44, New Series 864, 962.

Number 44 Etc. turns out to have powers of manipulation of time and space that make those of Matthew Star look feeble and a general knowledge of past, present and future that Dr. Who would envy. This raises general chaos in the printshop, which is having labor problems — yes, labor problems — threatened strikes and all that.

The story is weakened by a climactic vagueness about who and what Number 44 really is, after he's more or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

less saved the day; it all rather peters out in a sort of metaphysical lecture on solipsism. But it's beautifully produced, with handsome location sets and fine photography (including a shot of a paddlewheeler at sunset that will stay in my memory a very long time). The acting ranged from hopeless to excellent — Lance Kerwin as Number 44 was absolutely wonderful.

Unless something of breathtaking wonder turns up, we'll go on with this survey of the broadcast TV season next month. Tube continued...

Thanks to those technical wonders, cable, video tape and my friend Michael Franklin, I finally managed to catch up with *Mad Max*, the predecessor to *Road Warrior*, an Australian film I found more than usually interesting last summer.

As I suspected, *Mad Max* is not as good a film as the second one, being something of a preliminary sketch for it. Where *Road Warrior* is the ultimate car-bash movie, *Mad Max* is a fairly standard righteous-revenge (a la *Death Wish*), motorcycle-gang type exercise, though still coming up periodically with the quirky peculiarities of writing and directing that was part of the interest of RW.

But it lacks the epic, saga-like quality that was so impressive in the sequel, and also has little of its visual beauty. And it bothered me science fictionally that while MM is simply set in a seedy, energy-poor, rundown near future, *Road Warrior* is definitely stated to be post-nuclear holocaust. I want as much consistency in my film series as I get in the written ones.

Bargain Back Issues

Every few years we run a special sale on back issues to clear our shelves. Now, for a limited time, we offer:

3 different back issues, 1978-81, for only $3.00

This bargain price includes postage and handling, but the three issues must be our choice; we cannot supply specific issues at this price. If you wish to order specific issues, cost is $2.00 to $2.50 each; please write for free list.

MERCURY PRESS, Inc., PO Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here is a story about a far-out romantic triangle, a tale that answers the question: When first contact is finally made, what will the aliens really want...

Where Did You Get My Number

BY
HARVEY JACOBS

Cheryl Lik was thinking about her relationship which was rapidly turning to romance when her telephone rang. It was probably *him*, Arthur K. Borkle, Ph.D., and it made no sense. What did he see in her? Cheryl knew herself well enough. She had a certain quality and street smarts, but she was no match for a man who was on television, a man who wrote books about the universe no less, a full professor who said to her, "Cheryl, they call me a *full* professor but the truth is, my life is *empty*. Get it? The humor there comes from a play on the words full and empty. See? Don't you ever laugh?"

Cheryl picked up the telephone and said, "Hi." It was not Arthur K. Borkle, her unlikely lover. She heard a woosh of hard breathing that sounded like air being expelled from an overripe honeydew. "Who is that?" Cheryl said.

She heard a gurgle, the last gasp of doomed plumbing from a dying house in a changing neighborhood, a noise she knew from the television news when they show people complaining about a greedy landlord. It was definitely not Arthur K. Borkle.

"Do you have the right number?"

"Norpf. Norpf. *Huh. Huh. Huh.*"

"Cut the crap," Cheryl said. "Stop it now."

"Shapof zax. Doruxish. *Huh.*"

"What did you major in, communications? Get off the line, freak. Don't you people have better things to do? Go outside and flirt with a bag lady. I'm warning you...."

"Zolt? *Huh. Huh.*"

"Hold on. Just stay right there. If you're calling from a booth, deposit another nickle, please."

Cheryl opened a small drawer in the telephone table and took out a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

high-frequency whistle made for just such moments. "Are you still there?"

"*Huh. Huh. Huh.*"

"Good. Cuddle your ear up close to the phone."

Then Cheryl blew her Weirdo Whistle and blew it again.

"Oooguff." She heard the sound of a deep moan and what seemed like an eruption of bubbles, then a click. The line began to buzz.

"Exit one creep," she said. The phone rang again. Cheryl got the whistle ready, but this time it was Arthur K. Borkle who said, "Your phone's been busy."

"I know, Art. I'm sorry."

"Not to worry. It's just that I have about one spare minute to talk. I wanted to firm up our dinner date."

"Dinner is fine. Where and when? I finish at ten. Can you hold out?"

"Yes. It will be an assault on my peristaltic rhythm, but I can hold out. I'll pick you up at *Chez Toi* at ten-ten. Possibly ten-eleven, depending on the parking situation. Could you tell me one thing, albeit bluntly?"

"What, Art?"

"On our last date, if they still call it dating, I sensed that you and I experienced a high degree of physical attraction. Being two adults, possibly consenting adults, it occurs to me that in the natural flow of our relationship we might be approaching the threshold of inevitable intercourse. What I would like to know, Cheryl, is if you share those feelings. If, for example, you feel that the culmination of our evening together is to be sensually based, tell me. I'll schedule a shower. Of course, if you feel it's too soon, then be frank. If I schedule a shower, it would require that I leave the observatory that much earlier. I don't mind, but I would like some direction. That isn't very romantic, but you know what my life is like."

"Jeez, Art, what can I say? I'm not sure. I don't know. I mean, it's unpredictable with me."

"My spontaneous darling. We'll work it out. The simplest solution is the most obvious. I can take a shower at your place. It could be a portion of the love play. Preliminaries are important, don't you think?"

"I think so, yes, Art. Why don't you bring a Turkish towel, just in case."

"Was that sarcastical?"

"A little. Jeez."

"See you at the spa."

"See you."

Cheryl found the word *peristalsis* in her new Funk & Wagnalls: *A peculiar contractile muscular movement of any hollow organ of the body, as of the alimentary canal and intestines, whereby the contents are gradually propelled toward the point of expulsion ... Noun.* Her developing relationship with Arthur K. Borkle was nothing if not educational. She would emerge a better person, whatever the outcome. A brilliant person like him could only uplift those around him, like a sun. The telephone rang again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"*Huh. Huh. Huh.* Uytrwiq?"

"You again? Up your peristalsis," Cheryl said, and blew her Weirdo Whistle with more intensity than before. Again she heard the bubbling lava sound and again the line was broken.

"This city is full of zeroes and they all got a dime," Cheryl said to the air. "He must have used the other ear." She left the whistle near the phone. The last series of obscene calls had gone on for a week until the caller finally gave it up, probably because his brain had turned to gel from the high-frequency blasts. Cheryl's mother had given her the whistle when she came to New York. It was bought mail-order from a company in California for $3.95, with a money-back guarantee and worth every cent.

Cheryl changed into her purple spandex slacks and lavender metallic blouse. She strapped on the silver shoes with dagger heels. The costume wasn't bad, but the shoes were a killer. A cocktail waitress should not be expected to stagger around on spikes, but that was the way of things. She left for her job at *Chez Toi*. From the hall, she heard her telephone ring. She ignored it. She was thinking about the possibility of intercourse with Arthur K. Borkle. It was nice the way he solved the problem of the shower. His mind was a thing of consummate beauty. Three weeks ago she never knew there were such men in the world, men who focused on galaxies beyond galaxies, men who browsed the stars the way others browse the classified ads. What if he was a little older and a little skinny and little quirky? There were large issues between a man and a woman. To have him inside her would be like being plugged into all creation. She seriously considered conjunction. What would it be like to hold Arthur K. Borkle during orgasm? Words and formulae would fly out of his body and smash against her walls. Gigantic magnetic bands that run through the planet would contract *whereby the contents are gradually propelled toward the point of expulsion.* The rings of Saturn would whirl with slow majesty. Tiny moons would collide and turn to rainbow drizzle. Cheryl didn't know if she was ready for that just yet, and besides it was her time of the month.

They had dinner at the Planetarium. It was his little surprise. He brought two servings of Budda's Delight from a Chinese restaurant, a bottle of Rhine wine, even a candle. They ate up in the dome, in his office, so to speak.

"About what I said earlier, Cheryl, skip it. On closer consideration, it seems the more prudent course for us to remain virgin to one another for the time being. Do you know what D.H. Lawrence wrote about elephants? Those magnificent creatures explore each other for years. But when they mate, "they mate in flood." That is what I want for us, dear."

"Jeez, Art, that is splendid," Cheryl

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said, sipping wine. "In flood. That is beautiful. Art, I keep wondering, why me? What is it that attracts you to me? I mean, let's face it. You. Me?"

"Cheryl, let me confess something. I've had the desire to know you since I first walked into *Chez Toi* three years ago. The first night I got your number from the maître d'. It cost me ten dollars."

"You didn't call me three years ago. You didn't call me until three weeks ago, Art."

"You'll never believe what happened."

"Try me."

"I lost the number. Guess where I lost it?"

"How could I possibly guess where you lost it? In the library? In the bedroom of some Ph.D.-ess?"

"Not in the library, and not in the bedroom of what you charmingly refer to as some Ph.D.-ess. I've read through the library. I'm at the edge of information. I write books, remember? And as for the Ph.D.-ess, there is none. There was none. I conserve my seed, not through any grandiose scheme. I'm not sperm-selfish. Or a health nut. The simple truth is that I'm miserly about my scrotum because within the millions of cells in the sacred sac might be one that contains the code that will lead to the man or woman who comes up with the ultimate answer."

"To what?"

"The penultimate question."

"You see what I mean, Art? We're light-years apart."

"You excite me, Cheryl. In a most extraordinary way. Do you know that I am considering you for my wife?"

"Art? What are you saying? We're oil and water. I love being with you and talking to you. I even think about sleeping with you. But marriage? Babies? Take it slow. Please. I mean, jeez. Where did you lose my phone number?"

"Do you remember when we launched Voyager? The one that contained messages from global intellectuals and a selection of Earth's greatest music and literature? The one that carried a map of our place in the void?"

"Vaguely."

"Don't you recall that a British astronomer protested including the map because he was suspicious about who or what might find it?"

"Vaguely."

"Vaguely? Cheryl, it was one of the high points of human achievement. Voyager is Earth's missionary. Maybe a little misleading, maybe a bit biased in favor of our pitiful race, but why not put our best foot forward? There is life out there, Cheryl, believe it. And someday they ... it ... will seek us out."

"Like in the movies."

"Yes and no. In a curious way, the first contact will probably be much less dramatic. But who can say?"

"What has that got to do with where you lost my number?"

"Your number, darling, is somewhere out there...."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Out where, Art?"

"In the gut of space. I wrote it on a strip of mylar and near as I can tell it is now in the belly of Voyager on the way to a rendezvous with eternity. Think of it. A million years after we are dead and gone your phone number will be rushing toward some fabulous destiny, quite possibly outside time and space as we know it. At worst, it will lie in a pile of rubble on a distant speck waiting to be found by ... whatever."

"You shouldn't have done that, Art. You don't know what's around these days. I get calls you wouldn't believe. I was thinking of having my number changed."

"Don't do it, Cheryl. Don't break the link, squander the mystery. It's too tantalizing. Now, let's open our fortune cookies."

The fortune cookies were indefinite. One said A WISE PERSON LOVES A FOOL and the other said MENTAL HEALTH IS PHYSICAL DELIGHT.

When Cheryl got home that night, her phone was ringing.

"Yes?"

"*Huh. Huh.* Uyvish?"

"What are you, some kind of Communist Russian? You want the whistle? Just ask for it."

"Qat. *Huh.*"

Cheryl took a deep breath and whistled. The bubble sound changed to the sound of foam and a series of plurps. It was an eerie noise. Cheryl whistled again. The line clicked off.

Arthur K. Borkle's new book, *Waiting for Them,* was published at $16.50 and quickly became a Book-of-the-Month Club alternate. The first week, it was No. 10 on the best seller list. He was sent on a tour by his publisher. After the tour, he planned to begin a thirteen-part series for the Public Broadcasting Service called *Cosmic Shadows,* aimed at interesting minority groups in the space age. The night before he left, he gave Cheryl Lik a tasteful diamond ring.

"Don't consider it an engagement ring until you are absolutely certain of your feelings," he said. "Think of it as a toy you found in a box of Cracker Jacks. I'll call you."

"If the phone is busy, keep trying," Cheryl said. She did not tell him that she had been to the police because of the calls from a deranged foreigner. The police suggested changing her number but Cheryl declined. She knew Arthur K. Borkle would be upset if she did that, considering his special affection for the digits. She had also seriously thought about returning the Weirdo Whistle to Los Angeles and asking for a full refund, but she still kept the whistle by her telephone. A strange thing had happened. She actually looked forward to the peculiar calls. She actually had come to enjoy blasting the speaker with all the decibels she could muster and hearing whoever it was dissolve into a spasm of juice and air. The calls were very dependable. They came twice every af-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ternoon and twice every evening. There was a ritualistic quality about them. Between calls, Cheryl practiced blowing her whistle harder. She saw signs that her bust had developed from the exercise.

"*Huh. Huh.* Biparki?"

"Huh. Huh. Try this on for size, you rectum."

Tweet!

The telephone company tried to trace the calls, but a detective assigned to the case said they had no luck. The phone company representatives came to Cheryl's apartment and discovered that she was using an unreported second phone. She was billed retroactive to the first of the year. But the calls continued, along with the calls from Arthur K. Borkle.

"Did you see me on *The Tonight Show?*"

"Jeez, I did. Johnny Carson. Incredible, Art. Fantastic. You were terrific."

While she talked with Arthur K. Borkle, Cheryl Lik developed a habit of rubbing the diamond ring on her finger. It made her feel a little guilty because in some way she was more comfortable seeing her unlikely lover on the television screen than she was in his presence. There he was, reduced to seventeen inches, talking about the consequences of close encounters of the fifth and sixth kind. He seemed so happy. When he was followed by a commercial for detergent or deodorant or dog food, Cheryl felt nicely relaxed. She hardly used her dictionary anymore.

One evening in early Spring, Cheryl came home from work in a restless mood. It was the seductive weather. Delicious breezes seemed to blow between the spandex and her thighs, a tight squeeze. She rubbed her ring unconsciously, but the restlessness grew. She had received a letter from Arthur K. Borkle proposing marriage. He wrote that it was time for a decision. And that it would be nice to have her in Washington, D.C., for the taping of *Cosmic Shadows.* A highly classified Government project had been revealed to him. The real reason for his invitation to the capital was that a national sperm bank was collecting the semen from a very select group of trendsetters. Their emanations were to be kept safe in a Rocky Mountain cave anticipating catastrophe. If the need were to arise, future females would be impregnated with the choice effusions, thus guaranteeing a supply of smart Americans. Arthur K. Borkle was positive about the plan, but saw that it contained elements of infidelity. He asked Cheryl her feelings on the subject, asking her to probe her mind and confront such possibilities, however remote, as an accidental meeting between one of their natural offspring and an unknown brother or sister. Who could say how the Government would use his liquid gold? It could fall into the wrong hands. There were many nuances. Complications. The clever thing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about the project was that every donor was to be a guest on *Cosmic Shadows*, thus amortizing the expense of the journey to Washington. At least the taxpayers would not be stung. There was a P.S.: "As for the difference in our backgrounds, it can be overcome, dearest. I will teach you. And you will teach me. I accept a lack of pleasure in my life. I now have come to believe that each day should contain a balance of amusement as well as productivity. Remember what I said about the *full* professor being *empty*? It still holds true. Do not believe what they wrote on my book jacket. If your answer is YES! we can marry in one month. It is even conceivable that the ceremony would be performed by a Justice of the Supreme Court, possibly at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. (The first episode of *Cosmic Shadows* deals with the Hispanic role in the Glenn launch, i.e., he landed near Grand Bahama Island. Get it?) Love, Arthur."

Cheryl knew that Arthur K. Borkle would call that night for his answer. That fact compounded her restless mood. She was flattered by the proposal, but unsure of her role in an Owl-and-the-Pussycat romance. All that limelight. All those famous people. All the teaching and learning.

When she heard her phone ring, she felt comforted. Either way, the voice on the other end would be familiar. It was not Arthur K. Borkle.

"*Huh. Huh. Huh.* Yqzxop?"

"You sound high."

"Gfarv? *Huh?*"

"You want the whistle, right? You can't wait for the whistle? It took a while, but I get the message you like the whistle, right?"

"*Huh.* Reuyt swonl argu gfarv. Gfarv? *Huh?*"

"You're pretty talkative tonight, aren't you. I got news. No whistle. Put that in your ear and chew it."

Cheryl hung up. She was sorry she had been so curt. She blew the whistle twice, changed into her robe, made a drink and sat down to read a magazine. Arthur K. Borkle was scheduled for the *Today Show*. She would watch him banter with Tom Snyder, and then he would call. YES?

There was a heavy knock at her door.

"Who is it?" Cheryl said.

"*Huh. Huh. Huh.*"

"You?"

"Wxwop!"

"You think I'll let you in? You think I'm crazy?"

"*Huh.*"

"All right. Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? But I'm warning you ... I've got my whistle."

"Tcshiz."

"Calm down, sport. I've seen them all."

Cheryl opened the door. There stood a very odd creature, holding a flower she had never seen before. She sensed that they had very little in common. It picked her up, carried her to her folding bed, unfolded the bed with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some appendage or other, undressed her slowly, kissed her passionately on the mouth and eyes, slipped the diamond off her finger, ate it, spit out the pieces, stroked her with a hundred brushlike fingers, entered her, flooded her, stroked her again, got up, packed her belongings in a pouch that was part of its own body, looked at her longingly and said, "*Huh?.*"

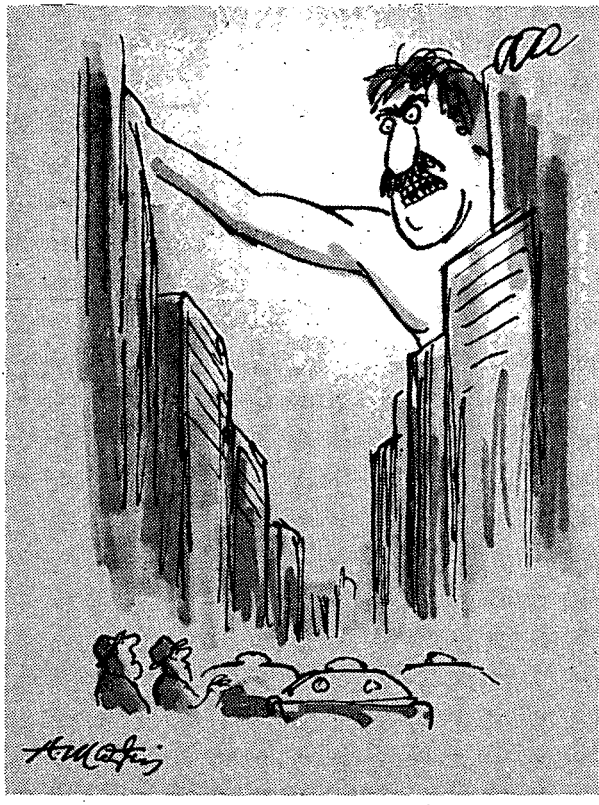
"Why not?" Cheryl said.

She was lifted over a moist shoulder and carried outside to where a spaceship waited. From the ship came a series of squeals that were probably meant to be music.

The spaceship trembled and rose, hovered and spurted into a cover of low-hanging clouds.

At midnight, Cheryl Lik's television set came on by automatic timer. There was Arthur K. Borkle, rigid in his chair, while Tom Snyder read his credits.

After the show, Cheryl Lik's phone rang in the empty apartment.



"I knew there was more to fear than fear itself!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In which a research project aimed at visualizing, even participating in a subject's nightmares, takes an unexpected and chilling turn...

Spur the Nightmare

BY

EDWARD WELLEN

From his catercornered hiding place in the areaway across the street, he watched her come out of her apartment house. Fighting his love and his hate and his need, he just barely held himself back from jumping her, from taking her right there in the street and frightening the horses, if there had been horses. Even at this distance he could tell she had grown haunted-eyed, hollow-cheeked, twitchy-mouthed. She stared jerkily around, then stepped onto the sidewalk as though testing the concrete, warily ready to spring back indoors.

Failing to spot him, she breathed deep and committed herself to the open. She walked rapidly eastward, unbobbed hair bobbing. Watching with jealous pride of possession, he saw heads turn as she passed. Naicar Bowtri was one of those blondes who looks terrific in lemon blouse and lime slacks; for that matter, in anything, in nothing.

He forced himself to wait in the area way shadows till she had gone, and a bit longer. Her point of no return would be the bus stop three blocks east. When he felt sure she would not be turning back to get something she had forgotten — her billfold, her eyeglasses for reading — he left his hiding place and crossed the street. He let himself in with his duplicate key to the front door of the building. He took the elevator to the sixth floor.

So far, so good. He had not run into the super or any nosy neighbors. He turned right when he got off the elevator and strode swiftly — blurringly, if an eye happened to be at a peephole along the way — to the end of the corridor. But his duplicate key to the door of her apartment suddenly proved useless.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She had changed the lock since yesterday.

He grimaced. How had he missed out on that? Either the super had done it for her or the locksmith had come in a car with no advertising on its flanks. Well, either way, it was done.

He smiled. Did she suspect his visits despite his having hurled the keys back at her in parting — after copying them — and despite his pains to leave no traces? Or did she merely mean to make assurance doubly sure? She ought to know him well enough to know that frustrating him only egged him on.

It was done, but it could be undone. When you had a consuming passion even inanimate objects showed themselves to be enthusiastically with you or bitterly against you. His MasterCard seemed to leap into his hand in its eagerness to prove itself a master key. He slid it into the crack between door and jamb and forced it past the bolt. With some weight and muscle helping, the plastic gained him entry. Once again love had given locksmiths the raspberry. He stepped inside quickly and shut the door gently. He slipped out of his loafers and trod lightly in his stockinged feet so that old but not doddering Mrs. Parker in the apartment below would not hear walking about during an hour she knew to be a work hour of Naicar's.

Before he forgot, before he would let himself enjoy invading Naicar's intimacies, he made straight for the kitchenette. He opened the refrigerator. Inhaling its frosty breath seemed to sharpen his senses, to concentrate his mind into an icy dagger. His gaze shot to the quart container of skim milk. The waxy shadow of its contents, even before he took it out and hefted it, showed it half empty since yesterday. He took three amphetamine pills from his pocket, crushed them between the counter and the bottom of a glass, scraped up the powder with a knife blade and sprinkled it into the milk she would warm to put herself to sleep. He blew away what dust remained on the counter and wiped the bottom of the glass and the blade of the knife. He reclosed the milk container and as though mixing a cocktail shook it to dissolve the powder, then replaced the container in the refrigerator.

A half-eaten tuna-fish-salad sandwich caught his eye. His smile locked in place. Losing her appetite, poor thing? Take, eat; this is my body. But hold the mayo. He loosened the clear plastic wrapping enough to take a bite, to nibble what she had nibbled, then rewrapped the sandwich and put it back. He closed the door softly. The refrigerator motor switched on to make up for the coldness he had spilled.

Now he released himself to roam her rooms. His heart beat faster, harder, louder, as he saw, smelled, felt Niacar's ghostly presence, her imprint on the place. He rummaged through drawers and poked into closets. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

touched what she had touched, and in a sense that made them one again. Even to its being in the last analysis as unsatisfying; for, however close they had been, she had always kept some part of herself, however small, to herself, beyond his knowing in the unbiblical sense.

Today he made two discoveries.

The first, that she had been writing a letter to her older sister. He did not find the letter itself; that, she either had finished and taken for mailing or had given up on. He found a pair of false starts in the wastebasket. He smoothed out the crumples, read both drafts, and each time came across his own name with a shock. In what he took to be the later draft she let herself go, permitted herself to be more open about him, about their relationship.

...His name is Tom Ehrsruef and he won't let me be. You of all people know why I left home. I have to keep some part of me for myself; he wants to be my everything. I'm supposed to live and breathe only him. He's obsessed with having me obsessed with him. He was my live-in lover for six months, till he got so violent I threw him out. Not exactly threw — it took a lot of doing, a lot of threatening to call the cops and whatnot. He still keeps phoning and hanging around. I'm afraid. If you saw him, you'd believe I'm the crazy one, making false accusations. Even I sometimes, even now, doubt myself. Tom a menace? You'd never think it to look at him. He has such a nice smile....

Tom smiled. He knew he had a nice smile. People had told him so from the time he had been yea high. He had a memory — real or false; at this point in his life did the distinction matter? — of his mother drilling a dimple in his cheek with her fingertip. "Oh, what a nice baby; oh, what a sunny smile!"

...But behind that smile is a warped mind. He says he loves me. That's love? I'm telling you this now so that if anything happens to me you'll have something to go to the police with. Because I'm convinced he'll stop at nothing to get me back or to get even. Oh, I know, Sis, you're laughing right now as you read this and I can hear you saying there goes Naicar again, being melodramatic!!! But I swear it's all so. He means to run my life or ruin my life. I've gone to the police myself, but — though they don't say so in so many words — they think I'm paranoid, or at the very least fanciful, overimaginative, because he's made no overt move. But I can feel his eyes on me. I know he follows me, spies on me....

Fiercely, he recrumpled the draft letters, faintly feeling crinkly protest of ignored memory of original crumpling, and hurled them back into the wastebasket.

His second find was something in the morning paper. Rather, something not in it.

She had refolded it neatly, though

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

jam smears and orange juice stains blazed a trail through the once-timber when he opened it and turned the pages. She had filled out the current-affairs quiz and done the crossword puzzle; she had this drive to better herself, to build her vocabulary, to speak knowledgeably, cultivatedly.

The paper told him nothing more, except that juice stains, like a parked car's oil drippings, showed she had lingered over a Lord & Taylor ad; it would be the crew-neck sweater that caught and held her eye. Told him nothing new, that is, till he reached the classifieds.

There he discovered a hole. She had snipped out an inch-high ad, razored it out, rather, with the tool she used for cents-off coupons.

His heart went erratic. What was she up to now? Hunting an out-of-town job, looking to get away from him? He heard the blood pound. She ought to know better than to think that she would ever get away from him.

Hold on, it wasn't that; the pigeonholing wasn't among the Help Wanteds; the placement had been under the heading Personals. His temples throbbed. Personal? The word turned red. He would show her personal. Unless—

Swiftly, he turned the page. No, there was no ad missing on this other side. On this other page the hole appeared in the middle of a display ad for an auto dealer giving away Cadillacs if you could beat his price. Tom turned back to the original page. Personal it was.

He started to tear the whole page from the paper, stopped himself, and instead familiarized himself with the ads surrounding the hole. He refolded the paper as neatly as Naicar had, then put it back where he had found it. He looked around, regained his terrible calm. No sign Tom Ehrsruef had ever been here. Still, maybe Naicar would sense the electricity of his emotional storms, breathe ionized air charged with his presence, and start at shadows and shiver. He slipped into his loafers and left as softly as he had entered.

He stopped at a newsstand. The thick-lensed newsy still had copies of the morning paper. Tom, in his impatience, in his need to know, wanted to rip right through all the layers to the gold of his Troy, but disciplined, sado-masochized himself to walk around the corner — a Troy wait, he told himself with his nice smile — before opening the paper and riffling through to the classifieds, to Personal. He got his bearing, located the ad to fit his mental template.

WANTED: NIGHTMARE-SUFFERERS TO TAKE PART IN SCIENTIFIC SLEEP STUDY. ONLY THOSE WITH FREQUENT AND INTENSE NIGHTMARES NEED APPLY. PHONE FOR INTERVIEW.

The ad gave no name or address,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but the exchange of the phone number it did give belonged to the University area, so it was probably on the up-and-up.

During the time he had been with Naicar she had never once mentioned having nightmares. Nightmares were not a thing you could hold back from your bedmate, keep under cover. So the nightmares had started only since his leaving her. He smiled his nice smile, pleased to have come across this sign that her suffering went soul-deep and had to do with him.

His smile turning to one of wonder, he stared far into the realm of possibility. A flash of circuitry; a whole new line of thinking and planning had opened up for him.

What kind of nightmares did she have?

Was he in them?

He looked around for a pay phone, spotted one on the next corner. Fingering the change in his pocket to see if he had the necessary dimes and nickels, he made briskly for the phone.

He dialed the number, got a busy signal.

Herds of nightmares on the gallop, he guessed, lots of hagridden riders of the mind's nag. He held on.

At last the busyness ended. A woman's voice came on the line. "Are you responding to the ad?"

"That's right."

The woman rattled off a rote speech. "If you volunteer, and if you're one of those we pick, you'll have to spend several nights in the sleep lab here at the University. Are you free to do so?"

"I am."

"There's no real pay involved, just expenses." The voice hurried on, overriding itself. "Though the primary purpose of the study isn't therapy, it's possible you may get some relief."

"I understand."

"Good." Firm and brisk, though the no-nonsense voice strove to sound friendly. "I'll take your name and set up an appointment."

"Bill Dewey."

"Fine, Mr. Dewey, I'm putting you down for six p.m. Thursday the twentieth. Is that convenient for you? Can you make it?"

"Sure. Thursday the twentieth at six."

"Just ask for the Sleep Clinic in Montague Hall."

"Right."

He hung up, knowing he would not keep the appointment even under the phony name he had given. While it was tempting to visualize surprising Naicar at Montague Hall and letting her see he knew how badly he troubled her mind, he had no intention of spending this golden opportunity so unthriftily, of frightening her away. He wanted her in the program, he needed to know her nightmares.

He made certain Naicar followed up on the ad. He tailed her to the Sleep Clinic twice and proved to his satis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

faction, to his grim delight, that she had passed the interview and had signed on.

Then he phoned the public relations department of the University and found himself speaking to a Ms. Joy Larkin.

"My name's Jack Neilsen. I do freelance articles on scientific subjects for the popular magazines. My editor at *Pop Psych* suggested I do a piece on the nightmare research your Sleep Clinic is carrying out."

"It's not my Sleep Clinic, it's Dr. Zareh's." Ms. Larkin's voice seemed a bit querulous. "I'm not sure Dr. Zareh would welcome any publicity at this early stage."

"Then that's the very stage I want to be in on. I don't care to settle for the handouts everyone gets after the thing is over. If that was all I got I'd pass it up altogether. What I'm after is an exclusive. I promise not to publish till Dr. Zareh gives the okay, but I would like to be in at the start and follow the progress of the research. You think he'd go for that?"

"She. Dr. Em Zareh. Woman. Female. Opposite sex." The tone was mockingly reproving.

"Oh."

"Yes, oh. That, with a cross under it, is the symbol."

"You do have a cross to bear." He put his smile into voice and she laughed. He pressed his success. "Well, do you think she'd go for that?"

"I can ask. I'll get back to you. Where can I reach you?"

"I'm out in the field most of the time. How about if I phone you tomorrow, say at this same hour?"

"You'll have your answer. I hope it's affirmative, for your sake and mine, but Dr. Zareh's a funny gal and I never know how she'll take it whenever I urge her to cooperate with the press. She seems to think cooperating with means pandering to."

"Tell her I've heard of nightmare research on the West Coast and that I'd just as soon cover that, what with winter in the offing."

"Is there nightmare research on the West Coast?"

Tom put a shrug in his voice. "I don't know. Anything's possible, isn't it?"

Ms. Larkin laughed. "Winter sure is. I'll be waiting for your call."

"The answer's a reluctant yes. I think you got to her with the hint somebody in her field may beat her out. Can you make it here this afternoon at four?"

"Wait while I look through my appointments ... I believe I can fit her in."

"I'll tell her to expect you. Maybe if you're through playing hard to get you'll find time to stop in and see me either before or after."

"I will that. Thanks much. Be seeing you, Joy."

In the few hours before his appointment with Dr. Zareh he did some quick

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

research on her at the public library. He looked her up in *Who's Who* and *Encyclopedia of Associations*, skimmed through her book *Traum & Trauma* and her latest articles in professional journals, and read reviews of the book. Her portrait on the dust jacket of *Traum & Trauma* showed a serenely assured woman looking younger than the forty of her bio, with regular features and smooth, almost lacquered, skin over fine bones, a severe hairdo her only sign of or concession to pedantry or punditry.

Her appearance in person matched the portrait except that she was smaller than it and her voice had led him to expect. And on closer look a frown had wedged its way between her eyebrows since the picture-taking or had been retouched out of the portrait. Then, too, her hairdo had changed and had broken training since the sitting, stray wisps and loose curls softening the portrait's image of total control.

She gave him a brief but firm, firm but brief, handshake. After the token amenities, she beat him to the first question. "Who on the West Coast is doing nightmare research?"

"Not West Coast; Gulf Coast."

"Trust Larkin to get it wrong. Well, who on the Gulf Coast?"

"Fellow at U. of Louisiana."

"Oh, Louisiana." She gave a slight and slightly scornful toss of the head. "What line is he taking? If you know."

"Correlating nightmares and biorhythms."

"Oh, biorhythms." She gave a slight and slightly more scornful smile.

He nodded earnestly. "I feel the same way. In your *Traum & Trauma* you pretty much demolish any such tie-in. At least you convinced me."

A curve of her mouth said she took that with a grain of salt but still found it sweet. "I see you've done your homework." She looked thoughtful and shook her head. "Maybe I convinced you, but I'm afraid biorhythms, like astrology, will always be with us." She threw off her resignation and grew brisk. "All right, you have my permission to observe our progress." She gave him a hard stare. "I want no premature publicity. I won't have myself looking like one of those oddball faddists."

"I understand."

Her frown wedged suddenly deeper. "Have we ever met before? I have this feeling...."

Only over the phone, when I used a phony name. The gone and forgotten whosit — Bill Dewey? Ought to keep a little black book to check them off in. Better remember who he was now — Jack Neilsen. "A definite no. I certainly would have remembered meeting you."

She ignored his try at softsoaping. "Then it must be déjà-vu experience. Freud, you know, suggests all such experiences trace back to the mother's womb and environs — we've all been there before. If I had the time, I'd stop to analyze why the thought surfaced just now."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Because you suddenly recalled my voice and my words over the phone, and mom comes into it because the phone is umbilical, that's why. Better get her going about her project, keep her mind on that and off who Jack Nielsen reminded her of. "Speaking of time, when do your nightmarers start nightmaring?"

"They've been at it for six months." She cracked a wise smile at the jolt she gave him. "My early subjects have been University students. I'm widening it out now to sample nightmare-sufferers among the general public." Her frowning smile surprised him by turning impish. "Frankly, I'm weary of the sameness, of nightmares expressing fear of exams. There's variety out there, and it's true that variety is the spice of life." Her smile grew serious again. "And of course generalizing the sample will make our findings more valid, more universal. But, as I say, we're fairly well along." She even made a small joke. "I think I can see the tunnel at the end of the light."

"Have you reached any preliminary conclusions?"

"None that I'm ready to talk about. What I am willing to talk about is our procedure."

"Fine. I'm ready and willing to listen."

"Then it's show-and-tell time."

She gestured toward a door stenciled MONITORING, led him through it into what looked like a control room, what with all the screens and dials and all the computers and peripherals. She seated him before a video monitor and switched it on to pull in an empty cot strewn with wiring. For an eerie instant he had the crazy impression a ghost was getting an EKG.

He let his disappointment show. "I hope you'll let me observe something more than an empty bed."

Dr. Zareh made a face. "Don't panic. This is only to ground you in our technique. As you can see, and will see, we wire the subject up. That's not as bad as it sounds. We merely tape electrodes to record brain rhythms, patterns of blood pressure, pulse, respiration, body temperature, skin resistance, muscle tone, and eye movements. We record everything, and we videotape the subject, printing real time right on the tape — à la Abscam — so that we can match what's going on on the outside of the subject with what's going on inside. We let the subject fall asleep naturally. No drugs to induce sleep or alter normal thinking patterns." She looked thoughtful, almost dreamy. "That may come later." She shook herself. "But we're keeping this stage clean and simple, with minimal variables, elegant, not open to question." She looked to see if he was with her, and went on after he nodded. "We let the subject sleep till the subject wakes by him- or herself. If the subject reports a nightmare, the person monitoring from this station will interview the subject through an intercom system."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

All this talk of a subject made the subject seem an object. Tom nodded. "Gotcha. What then?"

"Let me back up a bit. While the subject sleeps the various sensors determine the onset of a nightmare." She hesitated an instant, hovering in mid-decision, then went on. "At that point, a computerized visualizer projects the nightmare on a screen."

It took a beat or two for that to sink in. Then the violence of Tom's reaction, his grabbing her arm and thrusting his face eagerly into hers, gave Dr. Zareh a scare.

He spoke obliviously. "You mean you can actually see someone's nightmare?"

"You're hurting my arm."

"Oh. Sorry." He let go.

She rubbed her arm with her other hand ruefully. "That's the sort of reaction I'm afraid of, the press media's tendency to sensationalize the more dramatic aspects of our work." She took in his sheepish nice smile and strove to be fair. "A certain amount of the right kind of publicity makes for easier funding, but too much of the wrong kind makes reputable backers shy away, to say nothing of lowering one's standing in the eyes of one's peers. That's why I stress that there must be no premature disclosures of tentative conclusions."

Tom smiled earnestly. "I promised I won't print until you give the nod, and I won't. But I have to know if you mean what you seem to say. Can you or can't you see someone's nightmare?"

Dr. Zareh sighed. Clearly, laymen tried her patience. "Remember, don't quote me yet, but I believe we can. I said it's a computerized visualization, but the computer's interpretation is based on thousands of correlations of brain wave jiggles with previously verbalized nightmares. It appears to hold up better and better as we go along, as we enter more and more data. After the subject awakes and is debriefed, we determine how closely the computer came to matching the electronic signals with the scenes and events of the projected nightmare."

"And how close do you come?" He leaned toward her in his eagerness to know.

She eyed him a moment before trusting him with the answer. "Off the record for now, I feel I can say we know more, or at least more than the subject remembers, about the subject's nightmare than the subject does."

"Fabulous." He meant that. "I can't wait to see."

"You'll have to wait." She held a poker face for a long moment before dealing him the card he was looking for. "Till nine tonight, anyway."

He forgave her and rewarded her for that with his nice smile.

He touched base with Joy Larkin on his way out. A toothsome dish, and he played up to her, and she proved a willing player.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So you're Jack Neilsen. I'd like to see some of your work."

"You will. Remind me to show you some time."

"I will. How'd it go with you and the good doctor?"

"She's letting me observe, starting tonight at nine. I owe you a drink."

She shot a glance at the wall clock. "I'll remind you of that right now." She swept things off her desk into her bag and got up and stood close with no wasted motion.

He smiled his nice smile. It couldn't be his own place or a bar in his neighborhood, where she would find out he was not Jack Neilsen but Tom Ehrsruef.

"Do you know a good watering hole around here?"

She did indeed. And after more than one, passing up the water chasers, she was more than willing for him to see her home.

It might or might not go further, but it would go no deeper than his smile. He didn't have to remind himself he was a one-woman man and the woman was Naicar. Joy was merely something to use till he regained full mastery over Naicar. Till he regained full mastery of Naicar he would know no joy.

Luck was with him — though when you came right down to it hadn't he made his own luck? — and Naicar and her nightmare lay open to him that very night.

The sleep lab proved to be pretty much a one-woman operation. A colorless student assistant prepped the subjects for wired slumber, three subjects a night in individual cubicles, then retired to an alcove and either pored or dozed over his books for the rest of the night. Dr. Zareh juggled the three nightmarers without missing a nuance; when nightmares surfaced simultaneously, she took one by voice and the other one or two by taped responses — encouraging sounds, mainly — to provide supportive feedback. Tom felt it would have been this way even had a retrenching government not cut this year's grant.

Dr. Zareh — he made a mind bet that before the night ended she would tell him to call her Em — sat beside him at the screen. Feeling her glance, he tried to damp down his responses, his vital signs, at the sight of Naicar. Despite the concealing eyeshades and the blocking wires, he knew by the golden hair it was Naicar. Dr. Zareh sounded somewhat amused. " 'You'd never know from the snaky Medusa appearance the wiring-up gives her, but that's one lovely girl.' I imagine that's the kind of lead you use in your pieces, isn't it?"

He smiled bravely over the hurt. "Please, Dr. Zareh. Don't prejudge me."

"You're right. I'm sorry."

"That's okay." Then he smiled winningly. "Do you mind if I steal that lead?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She laughed, and he saw she had warmed toward him. Yep, her melting point wasn't all that high.

Watching Naicar sleep brought memories of watching Naicar sleep, of whispering in her ear, "Dream of me, dream of Tom." Damn; he was getting worked up. Dr. Zareh would notice and start wondering about his professionalism, his reportorial objectivity. He took refuge in taking notes. "What's her name?"

"Subject N.B. I won't tell you her full name. We promise all our subjects strict confidentiality."

He shrugged. "Okay with me."

"Some history, some background. Three months ago her violent, jealous, paranoid boy friend choked her unconscious. From then on, according to the subject, she's had nightmares of a man with a noose in his hand standing at the foot of her bed."

Tom found his voice. "Sounds scary."

Dr. Zareh glanced at work sheets on her clipboard. "In her first dream as a volunteer here she dreamed she was trying to climb her way out of a glass bowl." Dr. Zareh gave a deprecating toss of her head. "That's not a nightmare yet, just an anxiety dream. She feels trapped; she's sorry she signed up for this experiment. But she's settling down and I'm hoping for the real thing tonight."

"So'm I, Dr. Zareh."

"Call me Em. She eyed him curiously. "Do you have nightmares?"

He had won his bet but he felt uncomfortable. "Not any more, Em."

She pounced on that. "But you've had them. When, and what were they about?"

"As a kid I had a run of bad dreams. I guess you could call them nightmares. I'd wake up screaming, sweating, shaking, because I saw a witch in a tall hat menacing me. The witch, I mean; though the hat, too, looked menacing with its sharp point." He had given away too much; he made himself make light of it. "Easy enough to explain. At the time, my mother was going to have another baby soon, and she was rough with me for behaving possessively, crankily, for filling the air with bad vibes that could affect the baby. As it turned out, my mother had a miscarriage."

"I'd call them night terrors rather than nightmares. There's a big difference, as I thought I explained in my *Traum & Trauma.*"

He had missed that in skimming through the book. "That's right, you did. But that's as close as I can recall coming to genuine nightmares."

Pursuing another line of thought, she ignored his last words. "And so you remained an only child?"

"How did you know that?"

Dr. Zareh nodded. "Ah. The miscarriage would have been traumatic all around. It would have filled you with guilt — and at the same time have given you a sense of power. And it would have made your mother cling to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you all the more — and at the same time have filled her with hostile feelings. Of course she and the witch looked alike, were one and the same."

He blinked. "You hit it." He smiled, but spoke vengefully. "You know, Em, you remind me of my mother."

Her turn to blink, but she smiled understandingly. "And of the witch as well, Tom?"

He didn't answer. Saved by the indicator light. The little red flashing snared Dr. Zareh's attention.

"What's up, Em?"

She waved him to silence, hit several keys and RETURN on the keyboard.

A monitor came to life and showed strange shape-shifting images that gradually pulled into focus. They lost abstractness and became anthropomorphic.

Over Em's tensely hunched shoulder he watched a sleeping beauty in bed, but in a bed that rode the rapids, that bobbed and swirled and plummeted with the furious rush of white water deep in the gloom between high and almost overarching palisades. The blonde princess — so that was the way Naicar saw herself?! — awoke and sat up in frozen fear as the bed headed for a rock dead ahead on either side of the narrow stream. A tree had somehow taken root in the stone. It had only two limbs, and these hung out over the swift narrow water on either side, each dangling a nooselike vine. "Phallic," Em murmured to herself, "androgynously so," and scribbled a note without taking her eyes from the screen. The screen showed the perilous obstruction from Naicar's viewpoint, distorted by fear, in what amounted to a zoom shot as the flash flood swept the bed headlong — rather, footlong — in an excruciatingly prolonged moment of suspense toward the treetopped rock. At the last possible instant, Naicar threw her weight to one side, tilting and swerving the bed, so that it scraped past the rock on the rock's right. But before she could twist or duck, the vine on that side lassoed her, dropped unerringly over her head, tightened around her neck, and lifted her from the bed as the bed rode on. The screen went blank, and in the monitor Naicar sat up screaming soundlessly, her hands clutching her throat.

Em switched on her intercom and spoke briskly but reassuringly into it. "You're quite safe, Ms. B. Quickly, before it fades, tell me all you remember about the nightmare. That's what it was, a nightmare. Go right ahead."

Naicar stared around at the neutral gray of the walls, looked down at the nonflowing floor, and slowly loosened her hands and let them fall, first to her breasts, then to her lap. She spoke in a draggy, almost drugged voice. "I was in bed — not a bed like this one, but a big four-poster. I guess there had been a big flood, because the bed was afloat. There was a big wind, too, that helped move the bed faster downstream. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wind, in fact, was strong enough to tear the bed's curtains to shreds."

Em made a face and shook her head; the simulator hadn't picked up on those details. "Good. Go on."

"The wind died down after a while, but the current strengthened as the stream narrowed. The bed sped even more rapidly toward a mangrove tree growing smack in midstream. Then I saw the mangrove was a man. He had taken root, had grown a hide of bark and moss. He stood arms wide; each arm ended in a hangman's knot. Somehow I had time for a good look at his face, a face carved out of the living wood, and the shape of the outline of the face was a carved heart. It was the face of Tom — I told you about him — and the face was alive. I felt fear, and yet a kind of pity, when I saw a red gum or a red sap drip from the eyes. I don't know if mangroves have sap, or sap that color, but this mangrove wept red. Up to now I had the feeling that in spite of everything I still had a measure of control. Somehow I knew I could steer the bed with my mind. I only had to think 'Go right' and it would veer to the right or 'Go left' and it would steer left. But the tree's face held me frozen with its bleeding eyes, with its terrible stare, and I had a hard time finding the strength, the will, to break free and pick which way to go. Either way, I would head into a loop, a hangman's noose. At the very last second, when the face in the trunk opened its mouth wide in a smiling hollow big enough to swallow the bed, and me with it, and when I had the sinking sensation, the drowning feeling, that I had waited too long, that no time remained to swerve, I thought desperately 'Go right' and the bed swung right. I was so pleased with myself at escaping the smile that I forgot about the loop. Next thing I knew, the noose was around my neck and tightening. And that's when I woke up."

Tom found himself in a sweat of mixed pleasure and alarm; pleasure that he played the key part in Naicar's nightmare, alarm that Em would prematurely identify her Jack as Naicar's Tom. So far, his luck held; the visualizer hadn't picked up any details of the mangrove's face, of *his* face. If his face had shown on the screen, clear enough for Em to recognize, Em's latent suspicions would have surfaced, the coincidence of his resemblance to N.B.'s image of her ex-lover would have been too much, Em would belatedly have demanded to see his credentials, and his imposture would have ended right then and there.

As it was, Em frowned. But her frown proved not for him. She spoke into the intercom with preoccupied kindliness. "Thank you, N.B. That was very helpful. Now put your sleepshade back on and try to go back to sleep." She switched off the intercom. She remembered Jack Neilsen and turned with a quizzical look. "Well, what do you think of our little demonstration?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tom swallowed hard before answering. "Remarkable: I seemed to be right there."

Em shook her head. "Close, but no cigar." She looked suddenly inward. "Why 'cigar'? What's the association? ... Ah: pipe dream." She turned outward again. "Okay. The visualizer missed several significant details: bleeding eyes, cavernous mouth. Still have a job ahead of us, much refining to do."

The details they did have fascinated Tom. With a shiver of pleasure he retasted the knowledge that he was implanted — even if all too literally, as a tree — in Naicar's nightmare. He wanted to understand the details, penetrate Naicar's web of associations. Why a mangrove? Why the four-poster? Why the flood? Maybe Em could tell him. Start with the two nooses. "What do you make of there being two nooses?"

Em frowned. "A bit early to dissect the nightmare. I'll want to rerun it a couple-three times, I'll want to study the debriefing, I'll want to look at the sensor printouts. All these things intertwine, interrelate. But okay. Off the top of my head I'd say two nooses reflect one of the dream mechanisms — overdetermination."

He pretended to take notes. "How would you define overdetermination?"

She eyed him rebukingly. "I don't like definitions — as you should know from *Traum & Trauma*. I'll give you a for-instance instead. Take the name 'Fanny Assingham' in Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*. Not two, but three, of the same thing. Now there's overdetermination!"

She stretched and sighed. "Take off your jacket and tie and settle yourself, Jack. It's going to be a long night. They're all long nights." But her sigh and the words had a satisfied tone; long nights belonged to the work she loved doing.

Tom needed no second invitation to make himself at home. Her stretching and sighing had done things to her body that had done things to his, but he reminded himself he was a one-woman man. He gave Em his smile of fellowship. He shared her devotion to the task at hand. Tonight and the nights that would follow could never be too long.

Em wondered aloud why Tom stuck with N.B. and N.B.'s essentially drab nightmare. Em said openly, in so many words, that for her own part she found subject C.Q.'s case history much more interesting biographically and infinitely more rewarding psychologically. And C.Q.'s nightmares! The richly symbolic images stemming from the time she was eight years old and her pillar-of-the-community churchgoing father sexually molested her! Talk about trauma! At eight she knew what Daddy did was wrong, unspeakably wrong, but at eight she couldn't give up the image of the all-wise, always-right father. Just look at the surpressed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

volcano, all the pressure building up deep down from the inability to talk about society's most powerful taboo: fearful word even to speak in a hissing whisper, *incest!* You could see at the root of C.Q.'s nightmares the thought, "Since it's too dirty even to talk about, what a filthy creature I must be!"

Tom was immune to Em's enthusiasm. He did not want to say that Em surprised and shocked him. On a gut level, he found her love of C.Q.'s sick case sickening. As a supposedly hardened journalist he should be able to take C.Q.'s problem, and the cloacal imagery it evoked, in stride. He could not let Em see his almost prudish distaste, his outraged righteousness. He found an out for the perfunctory attentiveness he showed whenever C.Q. performed her nightmare. "You yourself said at the outset that you're agin sensationalistic journalism. I know my editor, and she won't go for an in-depth study of kinky nightmares harking back to a horny father. Seems to me N.B.'s case strikes the right note."

"I know, Jack, but...." But then Em shrugged and swallowed the, for her, sour note. "You're the expert in your field." She left unspoken the corollary that she was the expert in her field, left unsaid that it he wanted to ignore her advice she questioned his judgment but he was free to play the fool.

Another night, another nightmare.

A good one. He needed no visualizer to picture the wild eyes behind Naicar's eyeshades. He felt charged but shaky, shaky but charged; weak with hunger but wildly in touch with the secrets of the universe, like a mystic fasting to see visions. When it had come time for the hooded garroter to remove his hood, Tom had been sweatily certain that the visualizer would reveal the face of Jack Neilsen.

Instead, the hood had lifted away to show a headless executioner.

To his own surprise, in a switching of dreads, he found himself masking a scowl of disappointment at his nightmare image's sudden facelessness. Could Naicar be working her way out of her obsession, freeing herself of his hold, driving him from her mind?

"Why did—" He stopped himself in time from saying "Naicar." "Why did N.B rise from the dead and kiss the empty air where her executioner's head should've been and then spit out a string of snakes?"

Em made a face. "You persist in asking nightmare logic to make daylight sense. Okay, I'll take a stab. Ever catch yourself humming a rock tune you hate? Consciously, it arouses sophisticated distaste for its maudlin lyrics, its childish sentiments, its defective rhymes, its nagging beat, to say nothing of its scruffy performer; unconsciously, it satisfies some primitive need."

He thought that over, and nodded. He eyed Em with sudden curiosity. "What sort of nightmares do you have — if you have nightmares?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Was he wrong, or did her eyes jerk for the space of a lightning flash toward the locked cabinet in the corner?

"Oh, I have them." She would have let it go at that, dropping her pen as a way of not meeting his gaze and of dropping the subject.

"Well?"

She picked up the pen, straightened, and gave him a none-of-your-business stare.

He pressed on. "Are your nightmares connected with your work? You'll admit it's a legitimate point for me to pursue. Are your nightmares the very reason why you're into nightmares?"

She smiled. "Is that the kind of pap psych — sorry, slip of the tongue — pop psych" — she was not sorry and it was not a slip of the tongue — "you feed your readers? You really think it's a case of 'Physician, heal thyself'? Okay, I can tell you it's not. Like all analysts, I've been through analysis, so I know my own hang-ups and I can say my getting into this field has nothing to do with my own nightmares. As a matter of fact, my nightmares started afterwards, after I conceived and programmed the visualizer and the ... other research tools. Okay. So I guess you can say they are connected with my work." She bit her lip, as though she had said too much, then shot him a look to see if he had caught that giveaway of remorse.

He had. "How so?"

She hestitated, but he sincere-ed and pleasant-ed her helpless with his nice smile and his look of earnest inquiry. She caved in, though she gave him a hard stare. "This is all off the record, understood?"

"Understood." He reinforced it with a nod.

"Okay. I have a recurring nightmare that someone will misuse my electrochemical technique for getting into the nightmare. So I've shelved it. That's it in a nutshell."

He snatched at that. "Getting into the nightmare? You mean literally plugging into the nightmare?"

She nodded. "I mean getting right inside and sharing it as it plays in the nightmarer's mind. I call the instrument an impathizer. Okay. You and the sleeper wear linked headphones — though of course they're more than just headphones — and you find yourself inside the subject's head, sharing the subject's nightmare.

He spoke accusingly, almost hotly. "You have that and you don't use it? Why don't you?"

She gave him a bittersweet half-smile. "For one thing, it's scary. I know. I've tried it. But the real reason is ethics."

"You're already invading the subject's inmost privacy, digging out the subject's deepest secrets. At this point, where does ethics come in? What's really holding you back from using the whatchacallit, impathizer?"

" 'Whatchacallit.' Interesting. The usual locution is 'whatchamacallit';

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you supressed 'ma.' Most interesting." She grinned mischievously. "Okay, I'm not trying to sidetrack you. You asked what's holding me back from using the impathizer. I'll answer. Not so much what I, Em Zareh, might do with it. I trust myself, go with my instincts — that may not sound scientific, but then science isn't all that impersonal — and I'm sure I wouldn't misuse it. And in any case my subjects are volunteers who know up front what they're in for. Okay. What worries me is what others, with fewer scruples and headier ambitions, would do if they had it. Rulers have a way of beating plowshares into swords — look what happened with nuclear research, what's happening with the space race. Wouldn't authoritarians just love to lay their hands on the impathizer, wouldn't the power-greedy do anything to get hold of it! It's the key to mind control."

"If it really works the way you say it does."

She saw his hook, yet rose smilingly to the bait. "I'll tell you, in a general way, how it works. In the wakeful state, visual messages that reach the hippocampus are transmitted to the hypothalamus. Okay. Normally, the brain's nerve cells translate what the eyes see — patterns of light, darkness, and color — into a coherent picture for the brain. Nightmares work the other way around. They originate, or localize, in the hypothalamus and are transmitted to the hippocampus. Call the hippocampus a projection screen, a cathode ray tube. Okay. You plug the subject and yourself into the impathizer, which puts your serotonin receptors in phase with the subject's. Okay. Neurotransmitters in the sleeper's brain carry the nightmare's sound-and-light show to the subject's serotonin receptors, and these, in effect, broadcast the same signals to your serotonin receptors. And there you are — inside the subject's nightmare."

Yes, there I am, inside Naicar's nightmare, springing out of hidden recesses of her mind to show her she can't escape my love, taking her in my all-powerful embrace to teach her she's safe from me nowhere, absolutely nowhere.

Tom smiled, then awakened to awareness that his smile was working something other than charm; Em looked positively frightened at having told him of the impathizer.

Knowing he would get nothing more out of her about it in the way of description, much less demonstration, he rushed to reassure her.

"It's all off the record, Em. A crying shame I can't use it, but I gave you my word." He heaved a heavy sigh, then lightened the mood with his best smile and shoved up out of his chair. "I could use a cup of coffee about now. How about you?"

Em nodded. She seemed thankful for, badly in need of, a break. The wedge of frown split the forced bright-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness of her countenance. He knew he had pushed her to the limit. He would get nothing more out of her. He'd be lucky if she didn't soon find some excuse to cancel their arrangement and boot him from the sleep lab.

Still smiling, he stepped out into the corridor. The door hissed shut behind him. He stood a moment, thinking. Yes, this had to be the time. Now or never — at least never with less difficulty. He made for the bank of dispensing machines, slotted the right change, and drew two cups of coffee. Looking around to make sure he was alone and unobserved, he laced one coffee with sleeping powder. He pinched a crinkle in the lip of that cup to tell it from the other; now he would not mix them up when he juggled them in opening the door.

He entered slowly, careful to keep from spilling drop one. He handed Em the cup with the crinkle. "Here you go."

Weary eyes lit with gratitude. "Thanks." The wedge had driven deeper, though, and he knew he had chosen — in time — the right time.

He gazed at Naicar in the monitor. She stirred, almost as though she sensed his stare. She tossed, moaned.

Em shot a glance at the readouts. For a second, Tom was afraid she would put the coffee down untasted. But she took a quick sip, made a slight face, gave a slight shrug of resignation, and chug-a-lugged to drown the taste, get it over with.

The stuff worked fast. Just before the weary eyes closed, they flickered in alarm and fought to open wide and fix on Tom. Then Em slumped. Tom dispassionately cushioned the fall as her head bent to meet the desk.

He paid no further mind to arranging her comfortably, but made rapidly for the locked cabinet in the far corner of the room. She had given it a give-away glance; this had to be the first place to look for the impathizer.

The lock would be nothing much if you had the right tool. His credit card was not the right tool. He rearranged Em so he could get at the desk drawers. He scrounged for something, anything that would give him leverage. He found a steel ruler, but it would not slip into the crack. He found a pair of compasses. The ruler hammered the steel point of the compasses into the crack, the compasses worked a space for the ruler to pry the cabinet door open.

Two linked sets of headphones rested on the top shelf.

The impathizers?

It looked like merely two linked sets of headphones.

The impathizer. Had to be.

He forced himself to snatch it slowly, grasp its operation carefully. You hook it up like so, pressed this switch, turned this dial. He glanced at the delicately snoring Em. Okay.

He found a spare white smock and put it on, a tight fit but it would do. Through this door, carrying the impathizer, then briskly past the alcove

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where the student assistant pored or dozed, and past C.Q.'s cubicle and O.P.'s to N.B.'s.

Naicar lay enmeshed in sleep and wiring. She stirred but did not wake as he fitted one of the headpieces over her skull. He found a stool, seated himself slightly behind Naicar, and fitted the other headpiece over his own skull.

He took a deep breath, pressed the switch, and slowly turned the dial. Things happened inside his head.

At first, only a buzzing light, a flickering sound. Then he found himself walking down a corridor remarkably like the one leading to Em's sleep lab — only the door at the end bore no legend. When its malevolent blankness failed to faze Tom and he reached the knob, the door's surface rippled, froze into evil wrinkles into which you could read a face, a face with a stern gaze and a wedge of frown.

The door suddenly boomed, in a viragoish version of Em's voice. "Danger! Unauthorized persons keep out."

Tom felt doubt, knew puzzlement. This couldn't be Naicar's nightmare. This had to be his. But he wasn't sleeping, wasn't dreaming. Something, someone, was putting it into his mind. That someone was not Naicar, though he had linked himself to her mind. Em. Em must've programmed a warning into the impathizer.

He narrowed his eyes, tightened his mouth. He opened the door and stepped inside. With a sorrowfully satisfied sigh the door hissed shut behind him. He whirled to look back. The door had disappeared.

But that did not matter. Now he was in Naicar's nightmare. He recognized the touches that made this uniquely Naicar dreamscape, Naircar unreal estate, Naircar nightmare territory.

The pervasive off-indigo of the sky, the slowly wheeling polar constellation in the form of the letter N, the forest — not so much a forest as a tangled web of shadows — the muddy swirl of the river in flood.

The river. She had returned to the time and place of the first nightmare he had witnessed. There she went, flood-carried on her bed. Now, however, his vantage point had changed. The river swirled around him, swept past him on either hand. He looked around, stiffly, finding it hard to turn, wondering where the mangrove was. Further upstream? Further down?

Before he could figure that out, the dreamscape trembled in a mindquake. Even the constellation wobbled in its course. The sky could not contain the terror; it yawned in a scream, showed behind the darkness a deeper darkness.

Naicar knew he was there.

The mindquake rippled up the scale, but it failed to dislodge him. He felt all-wise, all-powerful. She could not drive him out. The mindquake subsided, the dreamscape looked faded, spent.

Then a voice entered his mind,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spoke to him in the tones of Em.

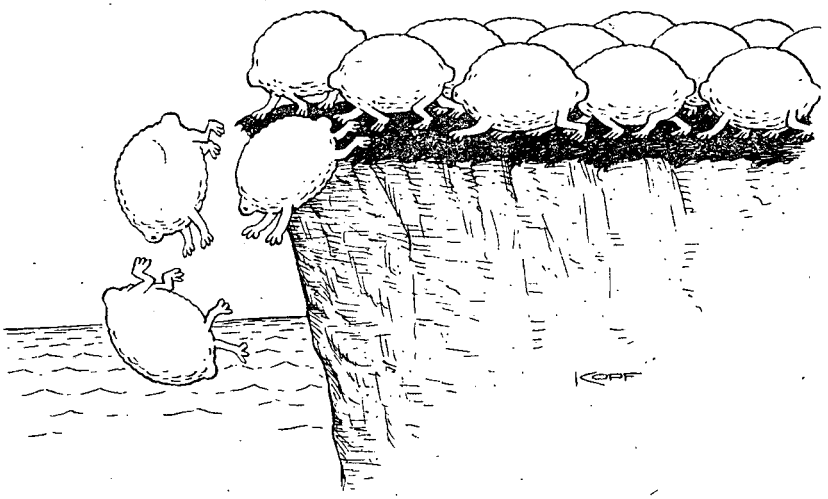
You ignored the warning, went ahead, used the impathizer without authorization. Okay. Now you pay the penalty. There's a built-in booby trap. I programmed the impathizer to stimulate delta-endorphins in the blood. These create a lower-brain block, cutting off the reticular formation and the hypothalamus, preventing them from relaying messages to the brain. Sorry, but you're stuck in the subject's nightmare for good. When I get around to unhooking you — or, if not me, whoever comes along — you will still be locked in the subject's nightmare, your body a zombie-like shell.

Fleetingly, he saw his Witch plain. Then, as the voice faded even from echo, so vanished the Witch even from memory, and he had the flickering awareness that not even his own nightmare remained to him, he was implanted in Naicar's, and would be forever although she herself in time forgot it.

And now he knew why he could not see the mangrove.

He was the mangrove.

Groaningly, gnarlingly, he twisted his trunk to see Naicar, to follow her. Through a moist red film he watched her ride the rapids in her bed, which, even as he looked, subtly shifted shape and became a prowed barque with a golden sail spread smooth and shining as it left the narrow river and headed out upon the wide waters of a bright blue lake.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Felix Gotschalk, who always seems a step ahead of most SF writers (or perhaps he's marching in a different direction), here describes in his distinctive fashion one fiscal year in the life of an American at the turn of the century, and it is going to come as a surprise to those of you who are still heating with wood and driving tiny imports.

Conspicuous Consumption

BY

FELIX C. GOTSCHALK

It was in the calendrical tier 2000, in the unusually golden autumn of that annum, as I recall, that the US Energy Synod mandated 50-liter fuel tanks on all domestic automobiles. One would have predicted that the size of cars would have evolved toward smallness; but the vast oil discoveries in Nevada and Colorado in the 1980's positively glutted the United States with oil, and the new multi level, plasticrete freeways that now lined and intersected the country were teeming with 3-ton Cadillacs, 4-bedroom Airstream trailers, and the ultimate consumptive glutton, an 8200-lb. Oldsmobile station wagon, sleeping four, or seating twelve. This somehow obscene land-yacht was thirty feet long, and powered by a 600-cubic-inch overhead-valve V-10 engine, developing exactly 600 hp, while turning a leisurely 3000 rpm, and drinking gasohol at about 4 mpg.

I had forgotten to connect the fuel conduit of my 1997 Chevrolet Starhiker Sedan to the underground tank beneath my ozite-carpeted garage that evening, and the pressure-sensitive alarm rang stridently as I rounded the tailgate, and my wolfhound barked, cavernously, from his billet on the balcony above. It had been a percentile 20 day at the office, and I was more than ready for an ancient dreg of garlic liqueur or a modern zap of LSD aerosol. I keyed in the tardy fuel conduit, and the bulkhead meter flashed its double-square digits in silent pik-up-stix of yellow light. It stopped at: 27:08 GAL — $4.36 PER GAL — $118.0688.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Most of us in the neighborhood budgeted $120 per day for auto fuel, and unless we made this quota, we were required to take a sight-seeing trip on the last day of the month to make up the deficit in consumption. The booming, yet truly tenuous economy of the U.S. was sensitively attuned, critically keyed, to the rapid and constant flow of barter objects and the activation of credit lines. If the archaic thermophysic principle of absolute zero theorized total cessation of molecular movement, then the modern economic principle of maximal consumption theorized perpetual motion. For example, I had to smoke one ounce of tobacco daily, take two, ten-minute showers, drink one-fourth pint of liquor, re-cycle four units of wearing apparel, eat actuarially computed kiloamounts of meat, foliage, and synthetes daily, listen to a fresh audiotape, and incinerate prescribed quotas of paper and plastic products, these among many other quotas.

The sonic bath flared on over the parked car as I rode the squirrel-cage lift to the arborium. The orchids there were blooming lushly, and I cut one to give to my consort. I was feeling the need for free time, but none was programmed for me until 11 p.m. that night. A fresh batch of calendulas had arrived that day, and Clara was gathering the wilting, month-old plants to place in the DECORATIVE FOLIAGE disposal. Plastic foliage was outlawed in 1994, the same year that plastic was mandated in the construction of new automobile bodies. The major steel companies were producing mostly automotive engines and chasses, and these companies were heavily subsidized by the government.

"Clara, my lovely one!" I said, bowing slightly. "Come into my arms." Clara was a beautifully programmed feminine archetype, leased to me for the fiscal-consumptive year. She was 42% bionic and left an estrogen scent that demanded a rutting response. She had ebony shoulder-length hair, big feline eyes and lashes, and full humid lips. Her life-purpose was to please me, and she was completely happy in that role.

"My Adonis!" she purred, and embraced me with breathlessly optimal skill. My eyelids fluttered in their bony nests, and my genital codpiece stirred. Sexual intromission was not scheduled until 12:24 a.m., but my erotogenic zones were far from dormant. On the wall, the isochronon dial flickered in tenths of a second, and, as accustomed as I was to a pretty totally programmed life, I always felt I was in a timed race of some sort; like a bobsled rider flashing bumpily down a serpentine Alpine ice-chute, a 50-meter dash sprinter, or a downhill skier. I had a fit of allergic sneezing once, and my credit lines were docked for the 9:02 minutes of non-remunerative time.

Clara and I strolled, in deceptive leisure, through the arborium, inhaling the wide-spectrum scent of the flowers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and plants. The workmen had almost finished the new wing on our mansion, this required addition now giving us (or constraining us) to utilize 6572 square feet of energized floorspace. We sat before the tri-video compositor and keyed our drinks from the arm-rest console. Clara had pink champagne and cassis, and I had vodka and garlic extract. Clara had total auto-programming control of her gustatory-olfactory sensors. So I didn't have to worry about the powerful volatile oils of garlic offending her. The compositor bloomed into its finely detailed three-dimensionality, and it was our beloved Potente, Teddy Kennedy, reading us the daily economic growth figures. His full, jowly face and ennobling vocal nuances never failed to inspire me to continuing loyalty to the U.S. I believe he could have elocuted the most flagrant nonsense and yet maintain his marvelously charismatic presence. The GNP was at 9.8 trillion dollars, he told us, with cash flow at 89% of accrual. Another banner day for us, he said. In other news, Bjorn Borg had been crowned King of Scandanavia, Philip Roth was Prime Minister of Israel, and Charles Percy was re-elected as Ruler of the Mid-Western Region of the U.S.; 102-year-old Henry Miller, in his 92% bionic body-prosthete, was still the Official Prophet of the country, and Anita Bryant was once again denied a visa to return to Florida from her exile at Lesbos Atoll in the Pacific. News, news, news. Local color, community festivals, municipal fireworks displays, snowmobile armadas snarling after wolverines in Alaska, a re-staging of the 1862 Battle of Antietam, and the World Copulation Finals in Tokyo City. I dozed — and received a mild electro shock from the compositor for my waning attention span.

Then came the music: the noble, architecturally soaring Bach, the quiescent purity of Mozart, the symmetrical blandness of Handel and Haydn, and the shimmering translucence of Debussy. An Elton John selection bit its resonant tensile credibility into my audio sensors, and I was left satiated and musically quotaed for the day.

Then the seven-year-old kids arrived, scudding, levitating, clumping, and somersaulting. There were nine of them today, all Spanky and Darlene clones from the 1920's, and I couldn't keep their names straight to save my 32% bionic ass. The boys' pockets were filled with low-yield, pediatric laser-knives, balls of plasticized string, explodable bubble gum ellipses, and M&M canisters. The girls wore lacy jumpsuits, and their cupid-bow lips were painted bright carmine. I took my seat at the paternal head of the long banquet table and a proper silence ensued. We bowed our heads and said the grace:

OUR EXALTED POTENTATE, TEDDY KENNEDY, WHO ART IN WASHINGTON DC, HALLOWED BE THY NAME. THY KINGDOM COME AND PROSPER, THY WILL BE DONE,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IN EARTH, EVEN AS IT IS ON MARS AND VENUS, AND ON ALL THE BLESSED ORBITING SATELLITES. GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY NUTRITIONAL ALLOTMENTS, AND FORGIVE US OUR ALLOCATIONAL DEFICITS, EVEN AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO FAIL IN THEIR CONSUMPTIVE QUOTAS. LEAD US NOT INTO THE LAXITY OF LOWERED CONSUMPTION, AND DELIVER US FROM THE CURSE OF BEN FRANKLINISM, 19TH CENTURY HOARDING ORIENTATIONS, AND THE HERESY OF BALANCED BUDGETS, FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY FOREVER, AMEN.

Immediately, Spanky #4 speared an entire Cornish hen with his glowing fork, and lofted it into his feeding trough. Darlene #2 squealed in delight and reached for a jellied parfait of ambrosia and mint leaves. It was the usual happy bedlam of dinner, the tapers burning nicely, the damask tablecloth stiff with plastistarch, the tureens simmering with unborn lamb, red snapper stuffed with truffles, a miniature suckling porker, and a fine crown roast of antelope. I ate mushrooms, avocado cubes, nuts, and icy fresh spinach. The entree of crown roast castered into my ingestional trough, along with pressurized tubers and fused artichokes. We ate for a half an hour or so, while the unobtrusive computer muzak swelled lightly through the overhead transducers. It was a pleasant repast, as always.

Then the pets came in: the wolfhound, two jolly slobbering St. Bernards, a brace of jaunty Schnauzers, the tawny ocelot, and the four Lhasa apsos. Barking joyfully, they bounded up on the table and began to gobble the ample remains of the food. Spanky #1 closed his eyes, giggling, as St. Bernard #1 (I forget the animal's proper Swiss name) feather-dusted his face with his bushy tail.

"Sedentary games!" a Darlene cried out, and the kids toddled and waddled off to their dorm to play Electro-Monopoly, Pin the Dick on the Bull, and Spin the Cylinder, accompanied by two Mary Poppins clones, the most exemplary of governesses. We would see the children no more that evening, and their sounds were shut off from us by the dorm's forcefields. Clara and I were programmed for creme de cacoa, mints, and centile fifty small talk.

"A fair batch of pediatric specimens," I said, lighting an 8" Maduro panetela. We stepped out onto an observation deck as the pets continued to eat, and the two Mississippi busboys came in to begin the programming of the clean-up.

"They are such fun to watch," Clara said, settling down into a chaise. Over the lucoid railing, the lawn fell away gently to the lake. Mute swans swam in the placid water, undulating their necks in displays of rare coiling grace. On the far side of the lake, the treeline of bamboos and balsas clustered close to the shore, and just beyond stood the high Lombardy poplars that surrounded our estate. The sun lowered behind the quartz

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spires of the megalop in the far distance, filling them with soft amber fires. From the trellis below us came the scent of honeysuckle tincture.

"What kind of day did you have, darling?" Clara asked.

"Centile twenty."

"Tomorrow will be better."

"They come and go, good and bad, and mediocre."

"I love being with you."

"And I with you, my dear."

"It's good to be so exquisitely pair-bonded."

"Yes, it is. We have a smooth life, full of positive reinforcements, and you are focal to my happiness."

"Annually renewable *life*," Clara said, and there was a sliver of cynicism in her tone that surprised me, "why must life be compressed into one fiscal year? I would so much like to stay with you longer." The semantic monitor above our heads began to bleep softly but insistently.

"An unacceptable subject," I said, "perhaps your dinner didn't agree with you." We were not supposed to speak on serious subjects, and the fiscal year, our annual term of life, was the most serious subject of all. "Our lives are beautifully compressed and filled with happiness. Life is psychological time, not calendrical or solar time."

"Dinner was wonderful," Clara's voice blossomed softly, and her tone was beautifully reinforcing, "and you are wonderful, too." I put my arm around her small smooth shoulder, and we watched the massive solar gong set behind the crowded spiked and spired skyline of the far-off city. The monitor returned to its silence, signaling the acceptable verbal content of our interchange.

We took an equine-drawn cab to the ballet house that night, all dressed in formal clothing. The points of the wing collar stuck up into my neck, so that I held my head in an enforced regal elevation, and my blue velour tux was piped with the blackest pitchblende satin. I couldn't describe what Clara wore, except that it was skin-tight and filmy and gossamer, and yet it was queenly and dignified, too, with a high lacy collar and an energized zircon choker. The theater was filled with opulently dressed people, and the ritual of moving about, finding seats, postural protocol, and all the assorted smiles and bows and nods (with an occasional heel-clicking Teutonic bow) was carried out flawlessly. The audience applauded properly, in restrained cascades of solid approbation, and there were a few strategically voiced bravos. The orchestra gave out its discrete swell of accompaniment, and the stage was variably filled with lithesome ballerinas and muscular leaping young men with thick necks and lion's mane hair.

We arrived back at the estate at 11 p.m., and, thank God, now it was *free time*. I shucked my tux, stripped down to codpiece and tank shirt, and rubbed both sides of my neck where the wing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

collar had so unceasingly prodded me. The isochronon winked into darkness, and the house fell wonderfully silent. I lay down on an air-chaise and tried to imagine I was a massive, sodden giant, asleep in a field of moss and buttercups. I relaxed as completely as I could, strangely enjoying the weight of my cheek flattening out against the slightly resilient chaise. For the time being, there were no goals, no timed tasks, no accrual quotas, no external constraints. I fell into a languid homeostatic balance, and my heartbeat slowed to about 1 beat ps. Clara swirled slowly around the room, like Ginger Rogers dancing with an invisible, but nonetheless elegant, Fred Astaire. We surely had high profiles, Clara and I, we were conspicuous consumers, though now we floated, contentedly, in *free time*.

The isochronon reactivated at midnight, and Clara and I retired to the 40x40 master and mistress bedroom, with its heavy red draperies and huge circular bed. A 20-minute wirebrush massage was programmed, and I began by brushing the soles of Clara's feet ever so lightly, progressing up the back of her calves, then on both sides, then down the shins to the dorsal surfaces on her feet. Then I brushed her ventral and dorsal thighs, with tantalizing flickers of the brush close to the genital zone. Then I skimmed her back and neck, stomach and breasts, and both lovely arms and hands. I brushed her neck and cheeks and eyelids and forehead, and then trailed a single plumbline to her pubic area. I was not scheduled for a massage that particular night, but neither did I require such exquisite tactile foreplay. My genital shaft was pulsing with engorged blood, erect and throbbing, and I entered the cleft on time at 12:24:07 a.m. It was a fairly stock copulatory regimen: one minute of implanted rest, three minutes of medial depth strokes at 1 ps; a postural shift to Sitting Budda #5A for two minutes, then the killing push-ups in the Missionary style @ 2 ps. My prostate kicker activated and my sacral girdle unhinged. I rabbit-pumped @ 4 strokes ps and exploded slowly into Clara, even her pelvic floor throbbed in high-frequency shudders and her beautiful feline eyes rolled in parasympathetic release. It read out as a 92nd percentile orgasm. I always held Clara for a very long time after copulation, and it was deeply pair-bonding for us. I typically violated the afterglow limits specified by the computer program, and often, the termination alarm sang its decibular song before I finally withdrew.

Mercifully, no governmental dreams were programmed for us that night, though we were monitored for 6½ hours medial-deep sleep. I could dream my own dreams — hurrah! In my dreams, I returned to boyhood, secure in the familiar soft uneveness of my ancient four-poster bed in the time-frame 1930. I dreamed I heard the soft clip-clop of the milkman's horse-drawn

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wagon, the glassy clack of bottles in metal containers, the tread of the milkman along the walkway, and the placement of the bottle by the screen door. Birds twittered tentatively, and I knew in my boyish heart that the sounds could not be hostile territorial calls, but were instead reverent and joyful greetings to the new dawn. I dreamed of brightly painted lead soldiers wrapped in tissue paper, of sailing paper boats in gutters flowing with the purest rain water, of climbing friendly chestnut trees, and of riding a tricycle along a broad, leaf-dappled sidewalk while a stately Packard phaeton drove silently by, its transmission singing a noble 30-cycle tone. I dreamed of steam locomotives, painted silver and green, their driving wheels churning, and the densest clouds of gray smoke chuffing up from the stack. I walked to school, my strawberry jam sandwiches fresh in their wax paper jackets, and my pencils sharp and ready in my bookbag. There was a delicious slow pace to the dream, as if people moved at half-speed. Streetcars ran on rails in cobblestone streets, yellow Piper Cubs chattered low in the sky, and a Coca-Cola and a bag of truly browned, natural potato chips constituted a highly prized snack, while listening to "I Love a Mystery" on radio. I dreamed of summer camp and the mythical blacksnake that lived beneath the communal outhouse there, the golden spiders that spelled wavering white messages in their webs, and the thrill of drilling a rifle-shot single between third and shortstop in a sandlot baseball game. There was the corner drugstore, the olive-drab mailbox, the three-scoop ice cream cones, the chocolate sodas, and the penultimate banana split. The mellowest of feelings infused me and I slid off into restorative, dreamless sleep. My sleep was predominantly my own, and I cherished the privacy of it.

We were awakened at 7 a.m. by the compositor playing and thrusting up a Meyerbeer Coronational, a rousing start for the bright clean day. My clothing was arranged in neat folds on the apparel dais, like so many thick towels in tiers of the utmost orderliness. I would have preferred a shorter shower, but the sliding glass door was time-locked for the full ten minutes, and I washed my heavy black hair twice with cognac shampoo. I toweled off briskly and jogged in place. There were knee-length black socks and calf-colored jodhpurs to pull on, a Swedish-mesh codpiece, institutional-looking boxers and U-shirt, then the inspirationally comfortable, combed cotton safari suit. The Meyerbeer had died in the distance and was replaced by cornet voluntaries from the 1890's. I could almost see the players in their white uniforms, on a gothic-gingerbread gazebo in a park, trumpeting their elegantly controlled histograms of brass sound. Surely, our call to afterlives will be by trumpets,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and when the bangs and/or whimpers die out, there will be clarion calls.

Outside, the freeways were already swarming with cars, and the pearl-hued air-traffic tunnels contained a few scudding aviettes. Inside, the house was alive with energy: voltage, amperage, wattage, kva's, cold water coursing in pipes, 180-degree water in 100-gallon tanks, freon in copper tubes, high-pressure air waiting in blow-tanks, fuel cells fusing their radioactive auras, pumps primed and ready, electric-eye forcefields irising and closing, conveyor belts moving, delivery troughs channeled and routed, hot food in microwave ovens, chilled food in icy shoots, frozen food in zero-degree lockers, relays clacking, rheostats rheostating — God, what a frantic movement! What a beehive of *action action action!*

I fell into the rhythm like a bather entering a swiftly running river, riding the pedwalk along the central quay, eating breakfast, watching tri-video, lighting a cigar, kissing Clara goodbye, sifting down the airshaft, irising the garage, and finally, fluxing my totally ready body into the seat of the Starhiker. I winced just slightly as the sigmoidal probe entered me (I could never develop sensory adaption to rectal inserts), and then the vital systems conduits attached their cold little conductor discs to my temples and throat and groin. The impact neutralizer bubble formed around me and I activated the car engine.

Inside the engine, flashes of fire ignited the fuel in the cylinders, and a new class of action began: pistons stoking and boring, bearing channels sliding, valves popping up and down like jacks-in-boxes with flat silver discs for chapeaus; there was pressurized fuel spat from injector pumps, smooth bright expolsions, exhaust pumping, gears meshing, shafts turning, bearings spinning — again, a maelstrom of action. On the panels before me, the data flashed on: readings on fuel supply, fuel feed, compression ratios, intake pressures, turbo efficiency, water and oil temperatures, charging rates, piston travel, bhp @ rpm and equivalent hp, torque — in all, 52 basic readings for routine preflight check-out. The systems read A-OK, and I slotted the gear selector 180 degrees aft and moved out into the morning light.

The Wheaton Raceway was a madhouse: ten lanes of traffic headed for the megalop at 85 mph, and a trough for unlimited speed on the starboard side. I was boxed in with an echelon of Cads and Chryslers at 86.902 mph, and a blood-red Ferrari snarled past, low in the trough. He was going 200 easy. Between the central municipal cruise control in the city, and the impact neutralizer in the car, I had no accident worries; in fact, there hadn't been an accident on this raceway for seven years. The cars swished and purred and hissed on the smooth plasticrete surface, and the graceful ribbons lifted, like macro-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cosmic taffy strands stretched to filmy micro-thin thickness. Behind our echelon, a sweeper swept along, easily keeping the pace, its silicon wiper blade easily 100 feet wide, and riding the surface with precise pressure. What little debris it encountered was vented into a small Dempster cylinder and ionized on the spot. Riding the Wheaton Raceway was very much like riding a high-speed Jap train from as long ago as the 1950's. The sense of speed and visual perspective was exhilarating, and if you weren't interested in the scenery, you didn't have to watch. Occasionally, I dozed as I listened to the manicky chatter and babble of the audio DJ's, but there was plenty of visual excitement in the trip itself. There were true Walter Mitty-George Plimpton factors here: we were racing in crowded lanes, surrounded by other vehicles, and riding a sweep of controlled power and speed that gave us to think that we were the origin of the power. Our bodies were one with our vehicles (particularly with probes up our asses), and we felt the urgency of the terrestrial race in our very mandibles and sternums and bowels. It was almost as if constricting the rectal port would yield the optimal rate of speed, a kind of anal Body-English. And we were, of course, very successful racers.

Now the fringes of the old city began to appear: white adobe hotels, cracked and gritty, row houses from the 1900's, substantial light brick houses with Corinthian columns, a giant railway station, steelyards, open-hearth blast furnaces, grain elevators, railroad shops, roundhouses, water towers, temples, kiosks, mosques, arenas, and parks buried in thick fleshy foliage. We shot through just one section of the outer ring of the old city, an area that surrounded the entire megalop. It was the outermost concentric band of the megalop and was, in fact, a *museum*. It was deserted, but preserved in forcefields, arrested, caught in time, suspended in dry-as-dust nostalgia. It was a bit like Pompeii, except that there were no strata of ash to dig away to observe this dim recent past. I looked down and saw an automobile service station shaped like a giant shell. A 1935 Airflow Desoto sat in front of it.

Now we shunted onto a parking deck exit, and proud Starhiker slowed to 50 mph and drew abreast of a flat-twelve Porsche. Outside, a 24-mph aseptic wind cleansed the air. A boldly angular Land Rover churned in beside us, and the three of us slotted into a tryad track on the 41st level of the parking hive. A militant-looking Negroid gladiator got out of the Porsche and walked away, his gait menacing and sure-footed. He stepped into an airshaft and his bicep looked at least 19" muscular girth. A slight, unimposing-looking actuary eased out of the squarish Rover, and the man was careful not to let the door touch the vulnerable flank of my Starhiker. He had his attache pod fluxed to his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wrist, like a brick mason carrying a single brick. His walk was skittering and tentative as he headed toward an elevator niche. For some reason, I sat in the car, unmoving, watching the other vehicles arrive, and after 42 seconds, I got a rectal signal to disconnect. Securing the car, I hit the pedwalk. Just ahead of me, a brace of wasp-waisted copulatresses stood, their gluteal globes optimally juxtaposed in one of the oldest body language signals of all time: the receptivity of the female, the elevated haunch, the mandril-stern, the moist global target.

The National Anthem boomed out from a huge orbiting satellite, hundreds of flags began their motorized ascents to the tops of tall poles atop mile-high buildings, and, out in the middle of the bay, the daily atomic bomb waterspout-simulate broke the water and mushroomed up into the clear sky, the towering spout the colors of old glory. This stunning visual panorama never failed to impress me, despite the fact that I witnessed it every day.

The president of our conglomerate that day was crochety old Herman Talmadge, in his 87% bionic body cylinder, clenching a black cigar between his bony dental ridges, glowering from beneath Neanderthal eyebrows, and stalking about the boardroom stage like a slave-master. A George Meaney clone matched him glower for glower from behind the Chairman of the Board podium. The *dominance-submission matrix* the two generated was fiercely equivocal. Talmadge sulked on his throne as flowcharts bloomed on huge screens. I sat dutifully in the third concentric row, in my 21st Vice-President's chair. I clapped on my headset and listened and watched the flow of our share of the GNP: death insurance actuaries suggested a temporary need for 20,000 23-year-old soccer players; the executive pyramid at Faisal-Opec-Exxon was looking like a skinny isosceles triangle, suggesting disproportionately Arabic power structure; and the mean credit line for a family tryad was $27,500. The National Institute of Mental Unhealth showed a seasonal lag in billions of mood-control pills dispensed and wanted permission to liquidate their surpluses. The Seiko-Bulova Combine wanted citizens to replace watches every ten days (the requirement was now 20 days), and the National Dental Amalgam wanted dentures replaced every six months instead of the current twelve. The Dentyne-Wrigley people lobbied for increased utilization of plasticized bubble gum, demanding that the provost robots have the authority to require a citizen to display an actively chewed sample on demand. All around me, young managers sat importantly, their faces taut with the precise reverent-incisive attention appropriate to their positions. The board members and co-presidents were seated on the inner

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rings, and behind me, behind us, the rank and file staffers. The scene was just slightly reminiscent of the UN General Assemblies, and even a little like the League of Nations. The screens rolled and flashed and stroboscoped, the audials purred and hissed and chittered, and I keyed in my production quotas for the day, based on the best extrapolate-channels I could discern in the flow of supply and demand.

Talmadge and Meaney stalked out together, and that bothered me. I got a vicarious kick out of watching a power struggle, but feeling the combined power of these two leaders gave me an anxiety reaction. I was in the top quartile of the conglomerate pyramid, and moderately vulnerable. As long as I made my production quotas I was safe. The meeting adjourned, and I joined a cadre of peers for the dropshaft ride to the great workroom, a spuriously anachronistic looking enclosure, some 200 feet long, 100 wide, and with a 50-foot-high convex dome. There were rooms like this built as early as 1885 (the Rookery in Chicago was a fine example). Rooms this vast used to contain machines or work benches or desks; ours contained computer consoles, and I sat down at mine to begin the workday. I thought, what the hell, another day, another $802.91.

At 11:42 a.m., it happened. I knew all along that there would be no warning, and that was merciful. A provost robot castered silently up the aisle beside me and shot a blast of Percadan in my hip. In the brief flash of cognitive clarity that preceded the marvelous swell of psychotrophic joy the blast spread through me, I knew that my fiscal-consumptive year was up. I had lived my year normally, adequately, equivocally, *well* — I would never know my aggregate rank — and now I would be replaced by another conspicuous consumer. Just as people used to live to be 20 or 30 or 40, and yet filled their lives with ample experience; and just as people lived 137 years and had barren experiential content, so now, I had lived my single American fiscal-consumptive year, burgeoning with life experiences: pain and joy, fulfillment and despair, discovery and loss, beauty and crudity, satiation and hunger, bravery and cowardice, dominance and submission, blood and semen and spittle and phlegm and excreta; plunging orgasmic triumphs and flaccid defeats, strokes and discounts, the taste of bile and the taste of ambrosia, somesthesis, kinesthesis, proprioception, dialectic and evolution, thesis and antithesis, microcosm and macrocosm.

Just as beauty is subjective, so must I be now, especially in the throes of my psychotrophic sedation. I may not very credibly relate to you the conclusion of my life, since my awareness is now arrested; but we all can guess with fair accuracy what happens. It is like any death in any society: the estate of the decedent is liquidated and the consumptive quotas reassigned. I believe

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my body will be vaporized into absolute nothingness, though I should not be surprised if it is dissected and every portion marketed in some way. My house, together with its myriad contents, will be razed to the ground and the acreage plowed. One hundred workmen will construct a new dwelling there in a few days, and a new consumer will be assigned to the billet. My car will be compressed into a small block and dropped into the Marianas Trench. My lovely consort will also die today, as our fiscal-year spans are in tandem. I would like to die in her arms, but the arms of Percadan are sweet indeed. I leave no progeny and no legacy, but it is of little consequence: 100,000 people die every day in the U.S., and 100,000 are replaced every day. I hope when your turn comes, you will have a good fiscal year.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS ON THE MOVE

If you are planning a change of address please notify us as far in advance as possible, and allow six weeks for the change to become effective.

Be sure to give us both your old and new address, including the zip codes. Print clearly and, if possible, attach an old mailing label.

OLD ADDRESS
(attach label here if available)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____
(please print)

NEW ADDRESS

Name _____

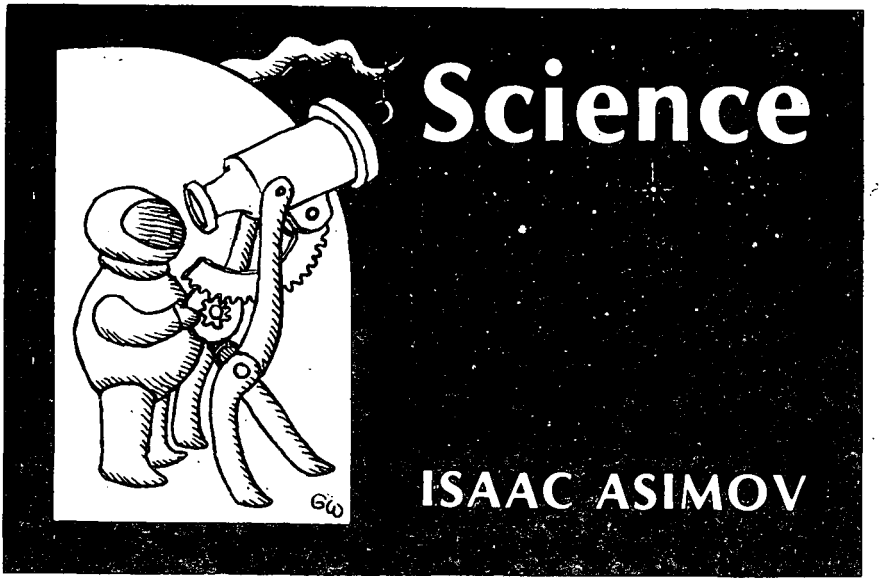
Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE,
Mercury Press, Inc., PO Box 56, Cornwall, Ct. 06753

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



THE ARMIES OF THE NIGHT

I attended a New York gathering of Mensa last weekend, for I am International Vice President, and it has become a tradition that I speak at the New York meetings.

Mensa, as you may know, is an organization of high-IQ people, and I have encountered many very bright and very lovable people there so that it is an absolute pleasure to attend the meetings.

However, I suspect that it is precisely as easy for a person with a high IQ to be foolish as it is for anyone else.

Thus, a number of Mensans seem to be very impressed with astrology and other forms of occultism, and, on the evening on which I gave my talk, I was preceded by an astrologer who delivered some fifteen minutes of meaningless pap, to my considerable ennui.

Moreover, that was not my only encounter with astrology that day.

Mensans have the habit of challenging each other to all sorts of mental combat, and I am a natural target for that, although I do my best to avoid it, and to do little more than fend off the rapiers when combat is unavoidable. Or, at least, I try.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On this occasion, a young woman, quite attractive, approached me (knowing who I was, of course) and said, quite aggresively, "Where do you stand on astrology?"

She could scarcely have read much of my writing without knowing the answer to the question, and so I gathered she wanted a fight. I didn't, and so I contented myself with a minimal statement of my position and said, "I am not impressed with it."

She must have expected that, for she said at once, "Have you ever studied astrology?"

She felt safe in asking that, I suppose, for she undoubtedly knew that a hard-working science writer such as myself is constantly breaking his neck trying to keep up with legitimate science, and that I could scarcely devote much time to a painstaking investigation of each of the many fringe follies that infest the public.

I was tempted to say I had, of course, for I knew enough astronomy to know that astrological assumptions are ridiculous, and I have read enough of the writings of scientists who *have* studied astrology to know that no credence need be given any part of it.

If, however, I had said I was a student of astrology, she would have asked if I had read some nonsensical book by jackass number one, and some idiotic tome by crackpot number two, and she would have nailed me as not only someone who hadn't studied astrology, but who had lied about it.

So I said, with an amiable smile, "No."

She said, promptly, "If you studied it, you might find that you would be impressed with it."

Still responding minimally, I said, "I don't think so."

That was what she wanted. Triumphantly, she said, "That means you are a narrow-minded bigot, afraid to shake your own prejudices by investigation."

I should have simply shrugged, smiled, and walked away, but I found myself driven to a retort. I said, "Being human, miss, I suppose I do have a bit of bigotry about me, so I carefully expend it on astrology in order that I won't be tempted to use it on anything with any shadow of intellectual decency about it." —And she stamped off angrily.

The problem, you see, was not that I had failed to investigate astrology; it was that she had failed to investigate astronomy, so that she didn't know how empty of content astrology was.

It is precisely because it is fashionable for Americans to know no science, even though they may be well educated otherwise, that they so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

easily fall prey to nonsense.

They thus become part of the armies of the night, the purveyors of nit-wittery, the retailers of intellectual junk food, the feeders on mental cardboard, for their ignorance keeps them from distinguishing nectar from sewage.

In a way though, my astrological adversary left prematurely. She had weapons left in her armory that might easily have lured me into further argumentation of an entirely uprofitable sort.

She might have pointed out that there were great early astronomers who believed in astrology. John Campbell once used that argument on me, for instance.

Consider Johann Kepler! He was an astronomer of the first rank, and it was he who first worked out the proper design of the Solar system. —And yet *he* cast horoscopes.

In those days, however, as in these, astrologers earned more money than astronomers did, and Kepler had to make a living. I doubt that he believed the horoscopes he concocted and, even if he did, that means nothing.

When Campbell used the argument on me, what I said in reply was: "Hipparchus of Nicaea and Tycho Brahe of Denmark, two of the greatest astronomers of all time, believed the Sun revolved about a stationary Earth. With all due respect to those two authentically great minds, I don't accept their authority on this point."

The young lady might also have said that the Moon certainly affects us by way of the tides, and yet for centuries most astronomers discounted that notion. One of their arguments was that every other high tide took place when the Moon wasn't even in the sky.

True enough. And had I lived in the time of Galileo, I might have ignored the influence of the Moon, too, as he did; and I would have been wrong, as he was.

Still, the connection between the Moon and the tides was not an astrological tenet; the existence of that connection was proven by astronomers and not by astrologers; and once the connection was proved it did not lend one atom's worth of credibility to astrology.

The question is not whether the Moon affects the tides, but whether the Moon (or any other heavenly body) affects *us* in such a way as to persuade us that the minutiae of our behavior ought to be guided by the changes in configuration of those heavenly bodies.

We know, you and I, what astrology is. If you have any doubts, read any astrology column in any newspaper and you'll find out. If you were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

born on a certain day, astrologers say, you should today be careful in your investments, or watch out for quarrels with loved ones, or have no fear of taking risks, and so on, and so on.

Why? What is the connection?

Have you ever heard an astrologer explain exactly why a particular birth date should influence your behavior in some particular way? He might explain that when Neptune is in conjunction with Saturn, financial affairs (let us say) become unstable, but does he ever explain *why* that should be so? Or how he found out?

Have you ever heard of two astrologers arguing seriously as to the effect of an unusual heavenly combination on individuals, with either advancing evidence for his own point of view? Have you ever heard of an astrologer making a new astrological finding or advancing astrological understanding in this respect or that?

Astrology consists of nothing but flat statements. The closest one comes to anything more than that is when someone maintains that the number of (let us say) athletes, born under the ascendency of Mars (or whatever), is higher than is to be expected of random distribution. Generally, even that sort of dubious "discovery" fades on closer examination.

Let's take another example. Some years ago, a book came out entitled *The Jupiter Effect*. It advanced a complicated thesis involving tidal effects on the Sun. Such tidal effects do exist, and Jupiter is the prime agent, though other planets (notably Earth itself) also contribute.

Arguments were presented to support the view that these tidal effects influenced Solar activity such as Sunspots and flares. That, in turn, would influence the Solar wind, which, in its turn, would influence the Earth and might, to a minor extent, affect the delicate balance of the Earth's plate-tectonic changes.

As it happened, the planets would be clustered more closely than usual in the sky in March 1982, and their combined tidal effects would be a bit more intense than usual. If the Sunspot peak came in 1982, it would be higher than usual in consequence, perhaps, and the effect on Earth would be heightened. *If*, then, the San Andreas fault was on the point of slipping (as most seismologists believe it to be) the effect of the Solar wind might supply just that last little straw and bring about an earthquake in 1982.

The authors made no secret that the chain was a long and very shaky one.

The publisher provided me with galleys and asked me for an introduction. I was intrigued by the thesis and wrote the introduction — which

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was a mistake. I had no idea how many people would read the book and, ignoring the caveats, take it very seriously indeed. I began to be bombarded by fearful letters asking me what would happen in March 1982. At first I'd send back postcards reading "Nothing." Toward the end the message read, "Nothing!!!"

As it happened, the Sunspot peak came well before 1982, and that spoiled everything. There was clearly no necessary connection between the planetary tidal activity and the Sunspot cycle. One of the authors of the book promptly disowned the theory. (And even if he hadn't, all he claimed was that a earthquake which was going to take place anyway, might just possibly happen a little sooner because of the planetary effects — in March, let us say, rather than in October.)

By the time the author disowned the theory, however, it was too late. *The Jupiter Effect* had caught the attention of the armies of the night, and they became enamored of the "planetary lineup."

I gathered from the letters I got that they thought the planets would be lined up one behind the other, straight as a ruler. (Actually, they were spread out, even at their closest, across a quarter of the sky.)

They also thought this was an arcane development that only happened every million years or so. Actually such groupings take place about every century and a quarter. In fact, it wasn't many years ago that there was an even closer lineup than the one in March 1982, but on that occasion some of the planets were on one side of the Sun and some on the other.

From a tidal viewpoint it doesn't matter whether planets are all on the same side of the Sun, or distributed on both sides, as long as all are in an approximate straight line, but to the lineup people, only the same side counted, apparently. Having them all on the same side made it seem that the Solar system would tip over, I suppose.

What's more, the planetary lineup fans weren't content to have an earthquake. The word was that California would slide into the sea.

In fact, even the loss of California wasn't enough for many. The word went out that the world would come to an end, and I presume many people woke up on the day of the "lineup" all set to meet whatever fate they were counting on when the great THE END appeared in the sky.

I couldn't help but wonder why they bothered to pin the "lineup" to a single day, by the way. The planets slowly moved across the sky on their separate paths and on one particular day the area within which all were to be found was at a minimum. The day before and the day after, however, the area was very little larger than that minimum, and two days before and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

two days after, very little larger than that. Whatever the material influence of the lineup it could not have been very much greater at the moment of minimal area than at any time over a period of several days. I suspect, though, that the lineup addicts had the notion that the whole thing worked through some mystic influence that was exerted only when all the planets slipped behind each other to form an exact straight line (which never happened, of course).

In any case, the day of the lineup came and went and nothing untoward took place.

I knew better than to suspect that a single person would get up and say, "Gee I was wrong." They're all too busy waiting for the next piece of end-of-the-world chic. Halley's Comet, perhaps.

The illiterates don't even bother to get the vocabulary right.

A theory, when advanced by a competent scientist, is an elaborate and detailed attempt to account for a series of otherwise disconnected and apparently unrelated observations. It is based on numerous observations, close reasoning, and, where appropriate, careful mathematical deduction. To be successful, a theory must be confirmed by other scientists through numerous additional observations and tests, and, where this is possible, must offer predictions which can be tested and confirmed. The theory can be, and is, refined and improved as more and better observations are made.

Here are a few examples of successful theories and the date upon which each was first advanced:

The atomic theory — 1803.

The theory of evolution — 1859.

The quantum theory — 1900.

The theory of relativity — 1905.

Each one of these has been endlessly tested and checked since its first advancement and, with necessary improvements and refinements, has passed all challenges.

No reputable scientist doubts that atoms, evolutionary development, quanta or relativistic motion exist, though further improvements and refinements of details may prove necessary.

What is a theory *not?* It is *not* "a guess."

Many people who know nothing about science will dismiss the theory of evolution, because it is "just a theory." No less a brain than Ronald Reagan, in the course of his 1980 campaign, when addressing a group of fundamentalists, dismissed evolution as "just a theory."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I once denounced one of these "just a theory" fellows in print, stating that he clearly knew nothing about science. The result was that I received a letter from a 14-year-old who told me that theories were just "wild guesses" and he knew this because that's what his teachers told him. He then denounced the theory of evolution in unmeasured terms and told me proudly that he prayed in school because no law could prevent him from doing so. And he enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope because he wanted to hear from me on the matter.

I felt it only fair to oblige. I dashed off a line asking him to consider seriously whether it might not be possible that his teachers were as ignorant of science as he was. I also suggested that in his next prayer, he might implore God to grant him an education, so that he wouldn't stay ignorant all his life.

And now that brings up a serious point. How can we keep people from being ignorant themselves, when those who would teach them are so often appallingly ignorant themselves?

Clearly there are flaws in the American educational system, and American schools are particularly weak in science for a number of reasons.

One of the reasons, I suppose, is that good old pioneer tradition has always held "book learning" in deep suspicion, and felt that good old "horse sense" was all that was really necessary.

That the United States has gotten by and reached world leadership in science and technology has been thanks, in part, to its ingenious tinkerers the Thomas Edisons and Henry Fords — and, in part, because of the influx of many who had already received European educations or who had absorbed a European respect for learning and saw to it that their children were properly educated.

Adolf Hitler was responsible for literally dozens of top-flight scientists flooding into the United States in the 1930's, and the beneficial effects of their presence and of the pupils they helped develop are still with us and have helped to cushion the inadequacies of American education practices.

This can't continue forever. As our technology grows more complex, it becomes less and less likely we can depend upon the independent tinkerer. And Hitler's mistake is not likely to be repeated. The Soviets, for instance, go to great efforts not to allow anyone out of their country who might be of use to those they conceive to be their enemies.

Yet over and above the general inadequacies, it would seem that the American school system has deteriorated enormously in the last twenty years. There are horror tales, constantly, of people getting into college

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without being able to write a coherent sentence. And it is quite clear to anyone willing to look at the American scene with eyes open that we are rapidly losing our scientific, technological and industrial leadership.

Why is that? Here is what I think.

About twenty years ago, the Supreme Court decided that the American Constitution did not allow schools to be segregated on the basis of race, and the courts directed that children be transported out of their neighborhoods to even out black/white ratios. There followed, as we know, a white flight to suburbs and to private schools, with the result that public schools in most of our large cities are now heavily and increasingly black.

With that, there came a rapid loss of interest in supporting public schools on the part of the white middle class which supplied most of the financing, and most of the teachers, too.

You must realize that it takes money to teach science well. You need rather elaborate textbooks, elaborately educated teachers, and elaborately equipped laboratories. As the money available decreases, science education suffers disproportionately. Nor does the outlook for the future look anything but bleak. The Reagan administration is steadily cutting support for the public school system and is proposing tuition credits for private schools.

Well, then, you might argue, won't private schools teach science?

Will they?

The public school system is government financed. The individual taxpayer cannot easily influence just what his taxes will be spent on, and the school administration, if it has any professional competence, will insist on a well-rounded education. Teachers, as civil servants, are difficult to fire for the crime of thinking, and the Constitution serves to prevent the more egregious abuses against freedom. (This was in the old days, before the public school system was virtually dismantled.)

Private schools, on the other hand, are financed by parents' tuition, and most parents, fleeing a public school system they don't like for whatever reason, cannot easily afford the tuition they must pay on top of their school taxes. Naturally, they don't want to add to the expense needlessly.

Since an elaborate science education means an additional hike to the tuition, parents are liable to see the virtues of fundamentals; the old, traditional "readin', ritin', and 'rifmetik." That's a fourth-grade education, as it happens, but allowing a *few* frills such as the pledge of allegiance and school prayers, that ought to be enough.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The private schools have to be responsive to the parents and their pocketbooks, and so we can look to them for a *safe* education, something that will qualify people for the job of junior executive and develop their ability to handle three martinis at lunch. But a *good* education? I wonder.

I do not, however, want to divide the world into good guys and bad guys in a simplistic sort of way. Many a non-scientist is intelligent and rational. And on the other hand, there are scientists, even great ones, who have turned off into the bogs and morasses, both in the past and the present.

It's not really surprising that this is so. The scientific method is an austere and Spartan exercise for the brain. It represents a slow advance at best, gives rise to the Eureka phenomenon both rarely and only for the few — and even for those few, not often. Why shouldn't scientists be tempted to turn away, to find some other route to truth.

I was once a subscriber to a science magazine for high school students, and there came a time when I grew uneasy about it. It seemed to me that the editor was allowing himself to display marked sympathy for Velikovskianism and astrology. Once, when a number of astromers signed a statement denouncing astrology, the magazine objected, and wondered if the astronomers had really investigated astrology.

I was moved to write a strong denunciation of that silly remark.

The editor responded with a long letter, in which he tried to explain that reason and the scientific method were not necessarily the only routes to truth and that I should be more tolerant of competing methods.

That irritated me. I sent him a rather brief letter that went (as nearly as I can remember) something like this. "I have your letter in which you explain that reason is not the only route to truth. Your explanation, however, consists entirely of an attempt at reasoning the point. Don't tell me; *show* me! Convince me by dreaming at me, or intuiting. Or else write me a symphony, paint me a painting or meditate me a meditation. Do something — *anything* — that will place me on your side and that isn't a matter of reasoning!"

I never heard from him again.

Here's something else. Some months back, *Science Digest* was planning to publish an article about various present-day top-rank scientists, including Nobel Laureates, who have developed odd and mystical notions about the human mind, who are trying to penetrate the secrets of nature by meditation, who are strongly influenced by Oriental philosophies, and so on. *Science Digest* sent me the manuscript and asked for my comments.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I wrote a letter in response, which was included in a box (under the heading of "Science Follies") and which accompanied the article that was published in the July 1982 issue of the magazine. Here is the letter, word for word:

"Throughout history, many great scientists have worked on some far-fetched ideas. Johann Kepler was a professional astrologer. Isaac Newton tried to change baser metals into silver and gold. And John Napier, who invented logarithms, devised a monumentally foolish interpretation of the Book of Revelation.

"This list goes on. William Herschel, the discoverer of Uranus, thought the sun was dark, cool and habitable under its flaming atmosphere. The American astronomer, Percival Lowell, insisted he saw canals on Mars. Robert Hare, a very practical American chemist, invented a device by which he could communicate with the dead. William Weber, a German physicist, and Alfred Wallace, co-deviser of the modern theory of evolution, were ardent spiritualists. And the English physicist, Sir Oliver Lodge, was a dedicated supporter of psychic research.

"Knowing this track record, I would be enormously astonished if, in the year 1982, there were suddenly no great scientists who fell in love with speculative notions that seem, to lesser minds such as mine, to be irrational.

"Unfortunately, most of these speculative theories cannot be tested in any reasonable way, cannot be used to make predictions, and are not presented with compelling arguments that could convince other scientists. In fact, among all these devoted imagineers, no two entirely agree. They doubt one another's rationality.

"It may be, of course, that out of all this apparent nonsense, some nuggets of useful genius will tumble out. That such things have happened before is enough to justify it all. Nevertheless, I suspect that these nuggets will be few and far between. Most of the speculations that seem to be nonsense — even when great scientists are the source — will, in the end, turn out to be nonsense."

So there you are. I stand four-square for reason, and object to what seems to me to be irrationality, whatever the source.

If you are on my side in this, I must warn you that the army of the night has the advantage of overwhelming numbers, and, by its very nature, is immune to reason, so that it is entirely unlikely that you and I can win out.

We will always remain a tiny and probably hopeless minority, but let us never tire of presenting our view, and of fighting the good fight for the right.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kim Stanley Robinson wrote "To Leave A Mark," (November 1982) and has had recent stories in UNIVERSE 12 and BEST SF OF THE YEAR, #11. He writes that he has finished his Ph.D. at the University of California, San Diego and was married on New Year's Eve, 1982. His new story is a fantasy about a 17-year-old boy who sails with the Spanish Armada; it is an unusual and remarkable tale, one that you will not soon forget.

Black Air

BY
KIM STANLEY ROBINSON

They sailed out of Lisbon harbor with the flags snapping and the brass culverins gleaming under a high white sun — priests proclaiming in sonorous Latin the blessing of the Pope, soldiers in armor jammed on the castles fore and aft, and sailors spider-like in the rigging, waving at the citizens of the town who had left their work to come out on the hills and watch the ships crowd out the sunbeaten roads — for this was the Armada, the Most Fortunate Invincible Armada, off to subjugate the heretic English to the will of God. There would never be another departure like it.

Unfortunately, the wind blew out of the northeast for a month after they left without shifting even a point on the compass, and at the end of that month the Armada was no closer to England than Iberia itself. Not only that, but the hard-pressed coopers of Portugal had made many of the Armada's casks of green wood, and when the ship's cooks opened them the meat was rotten and the water stank. So they trailed into the port of Corunna, where several hundred soldiers and sailors swam to the shores of Spain and were never seen again. A few hundred more had already died of disease, so from his sickbed on the flagship Don Alonso Perez de Guzman el Bueno, seventh Duke of Medina Sidonia and Admiral of the Armada, interrupted the composition of his daily complaint to Phillip II, and instructed his soldiers to go out into the countryside and collect peasants to help man the ships.

One of the squads of these soldiers stopped at a Franciscan monastery on the outskirts of Corunna, to impress all the boys who lived there and helped the monks, waiting to join the order themselves. Although they did not like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it the monks could not object to the proposal, and off the boys went to join the fleet.

Among these boys, who were each taken to a different ship, was Manuel Carlos Agadir Tetuán. He was seventeen years old; he had been born in Morocco, the son of West Africans who had been captured and enslaved by Arabs. In his short life he had already lived in the Moroccan coastal town of Tetuán, in Gibraltar, the Balearics, Sicily, and Lisbon. He had worked in fields and cleaned stables, he had helped make rope and and later cloth, and he had served food in inns. After his mother died of the pox and his father drowned, he begged in the streets and alleys of Corunna, the last port his father had sailed out of, until in his fifteenth year a Franciscan had tripped over him sleeping in an alley, inquired after him, and taken him to the refuge of the monastery.

Manuel was still weeping when the soldiers took him aboard *La Lavia*, a Levantine galleon of nearly a thousand tons. The sailing master of the ship, one Laeghr, took him in charge and led him below decks. Laeghr was an Irishman, who had left his country principally to practice his trade, but also out of hatred of the English who ruled Ireland. He was a huge man with a torso like a boar's, and arms as thick as the yardarms of their ship. When he saw Manuel's distress he showed that he was not without kindness; clapping a calloused hand to the back of Manuel's neck he said, in accented but fluent Spanish, "Stop your sniveling boy, we're off to conquer the damned English, and when we do your fathers at the monastery will make you their abbot. And before that happens a dozen English girls will fall at your feet and ask for the touch of those black hands, no doubt. Come on, stop it. I'll show you your berth first, and wait till we're at sea to show you your station. I'm going to put you in the maintop; all our blacks are good topmen."

Laeghr slipped through a door half his height with the ease of a weasel ducking into one of its tiny holes in the earth. A hand half as wide as the doorway re-emerged and pulled Manuel into the gloom. The terrified boy nearly fell down a broad-stepped ladder, but caught himself before falling onto Laeghr. Far below several soldiers laughed at him. Manuel had never been on anything larger than a Sicilian pataches, and most of his fairly extensive seagoing experience was of coastal carracks; so the broad deck under him, cut by bands of yellow sunlight that flowed in at open ports big as church windows, crowded with barrels and bales of hay and tubs of rope, and a hundred busy men, was a marvel. "Saint Anna, save me," he said, scarcely able to believe he was on a ship. Why, the monastery itself had no room as large as the one he descended into now. "Get down here," Laeghr said in an encouraging way.

Once on the deck of that giant

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

room they descended again, to a stuffy chamber a quarter the size, illuminated by narrow fans of sunlight that were let in by ports that were mere slits in the hull. "Here's where you sleep," Laeghr said, pointing at a dark corner of the deck, against one massive oak wall of the ship. Forms there shifted; eyes appeared as lids lifted; a dull voice said: "Another one you'll never find again in this dark, eh, master?"

"Shut up, Juan. See boy, there are beams dividing your berth from the rest, that will keep you from rolling around when we get to sea."

"Just like a coffin, with the lid up there."

"Shut up, Juan."

After the sailing master had made clear which slot in particular was Manuel's, Manuel collapsed in it and began to cry again. The slot was shorter than he was, and the dividing boards set in the deck were cracked and splintered. The men around him slept, or talked among themselves, ignoring Manuel's presence. His medallion chord choked him, and he shifted it on his neck and remembered to pray.

His guardian saint, the monks had decided, was Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary and grandmother of Jesus. Manuel owned a small wooden medallion with her face painted on it, which Abbot Alonso had given him. Now he took the medallion between his fingers, and looked in the tiny brown dots that were the face's eyes. "Please, Mother Anna," he prayed silently, "take me from this ship to my home. Take me home." He clenched the tag in his fist so tightly that the back of it, carved so that a cross of wood stood out from its surface, left an imprinted red cross in his palm. Many hours passed before he fell asleep.

Two days later the Most Fortunate Invincible Armada left Corunna, this time without the flags, or the crowds of spectators, or the clouds of priestly incense trailing downwind. This time God favored them with a westerly wind, and they sailed north at good speed. The ships were arranged in a formation devised by the soldiers, orderly phalanxes rising and falling on the swells: the galleasses in front, the supply hulks in the center, and the big galleons on either flank. The thousands of sails stacked on hundreds of masts made a grand and startling sight, like a copse of white trees on a broad blue plain.

Manuel was as impressed by the sight as the rest of the men. There were four hundred men on *La Lavia*, and only thirty were needed at any one time to sail the ship, so all of the three hundred soldiers stood on the sterncastle observing the fleet, and the sailors who were not on duty or sleeping did the same on the slightly lower forecastle.

Manuel's duties as a sailor were simple. He was stationed at the port midships taffrail, to which were tied

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sheets for the port side of the mainmast's sails, and the sheets for the big lateen-rigged sail of the foremast. Manuel helped five other men pull these ropes in or let them out, following Laeghr's instructions; the other men took care of the belaying knots, so Manuel's job came down to pulling a rope when told to. It could have been more difficult, but Laeghr's plan to make him a topman like the other Africans aboard had come to grief. Not that Laeghr hadn't tried. "God made you Africans with a better head for heights, so you can climb trees to keep from being eaten by lions, isn't that right?" But when Manuel had followed a Moroccan named Habedeen up the halyard ladder to the maintop, he found himself plunging about space, nearly scraping low foggy clouds, and the sea, embroidered with the wakes of the ship ahead, was more often than not *directly below him*. He had clamped arms and legs around a stanchion of the maintop, and it had taken five men, laughing and cursing, to pry him loose and pull him down.

With rich disgust, but no real physical force, Laeghr had pounded him with his cane and shoved him to the port taffrail. "You must be a Sicilian with a sunburn." And so Manuel had been assigned his station.

Despite this incident he got on well with the rest of the crew. Not with the soldiers; they were rude and arrogant to the sailors, who stayed out of their way to avoid a curse or a blow. So three-quarters of the men aboard were of a different class, and remained strangers. The sailors therefore hung together. They were a mongrel lot, drawn from all over the Mediterranean, and Manuel was not unusual because of his recent arrival. They were united only in their dislike and resentment of the soldiers. "Those heroes wouldn't be able to conquer the Isle of Wight if we didn't sail them there," Juan said.

Manuel became aquainted first with the men at his post, and then with the men in his berth. As he spoke Spanish and Portuguese, and fair amounts of Arabic, Sicilian, Latin, and a Moroccan dialect, he could converse with everyone in his corner of the lower foredeck. Occasionally he was asked to translate for the Moroccans; more than once this meant he was the arbiter of a dispute, and he thought fast and mistranslated when it would help make peace.

Juan, the one who made the bitter comments to Laeghr on Manuel's arrival, was the only pure Spaniard in the berth. He loved to talk, and complained to Manuel and the others continuously. "I've fought El Draco before, in the Indies," he boasted. "We'll be lucky to get past that devil. You mark my words, we'll never do it."

Manuel's mates at the main taffrail were more cheerful, and he enjoyed his watches with them and the drills under Laeghr's demanding instruction. These men called him Topman or Climber,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and made jokes about his knots around the belaying pins, which defied quick untying. This inability earned Manuel quite a few swats from Laeghr's cane, but there were worse sailors aboard, and the sailing master seemed to bear him no ill will.

A life of perpetual change had made Manuel adaptable, and shipboard routine became for him the natural course of existence. Laeghr or Pietro, the leader at Manuel's station, would wake him with a shout. Up to the gun deck, which was the domain of the soldiers, and from there up the big ladder that led to fresh air. Only then could Manuel be sure of the time of day. For the first few weeks it was an inexpressible delight to get out of the gloom of the lower decks and under the sky, in the wind and clean salt air; but as they proceeded north, it began to get too cold for comfort.

After their watches were over, Manuel and his mates would retire to the galley and be given their biscuits, water, and wine. Sometimes the cooks would have killed some of the goats and chickens and made soup. Usually, though, it was just biscuits, biscuits that had not yet hardened in their barrels. The men complained grievously about this.

"The biscuits are best when they're hard as wood, and bored through by worms," Habedeen told Manuel.

"How do you eat it, then?" Manuel asked.

"You bang pieces of biscuit against the table until the worms fall out. You can eat the worms if you want." The men laughed, and Manuel assumed Habedeen was joking, but he wasn't certain.

"I despise this doughy shit," Pietro said in Portuguese. Manuel translated into Moroccan Arabic for the two silent Africans, and agreed in Spanish that it was hard to stomach. "The worst part," he offered, "is that some parts are stale while others are still fresh."

"The fresh part was never cooked."

"No, that's the worms."

As the voyage progressed, Manuel's berthmates became more intimate. Farther north the Moroccans suffered terribly from the cold. They came belowdecks after a watch with their dark skins completely goosepimpled, like little fields of stubble after a harvest. Their lips and fingernails were blue, and they shivered an hour before falling asleep, teeth chattering like the castanets in a fiesta band. Not only that, but the swells of the Atlantic were getting bigger, and the men, since they were forced to wear every scrap of clothing they owned, rolled in their wooden berths unpadded and unprotected.

So the Moroccans, and then everyone in the lower foredeck, slept three to a berth, taking turns in the middle, huddling together like spoons. Crowded together like that the pitching of the ship could press them against the beams, but it couldn't roll them

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around. Manuel's willingness to join these bundlings, and to lie against the beams, made him well-liked. Everyone agreed he made a good cushion.

Perhaps it was because of his hands that he fell ill. Though his spirit had been reconciled to the crusade north, his flesh was slower. Hauling on the coarse hemp ropes every day had ripped the skin from his palms, and salt, splinters, belaying pins, and the odd boot had all left their marks as well, so that after the first week he had wrapped his hands in strips of cloth torn from the bottom of his shirt. When he became feverish, his hands pulsed painfully at every nudge from his heart, and he assumed that the fever had entered him through the wounds in his palms.

Then his stomach rebelled, and he could keep nothing down. The sight of biscuits or soup revolted him; his fever worsened, and he became parched and weak; he spent a lot of time in the head, racked by dysentery.

"You've been poisoned by the biscuits," Juan told him. "Just like I was in the Indies. That's what comes of boxing fresh biscuits. They might as well have put fresh dough in those barrels."

Manuel's berthmates told Laeghr of his condition, and Laeghr had him moved to the hospital, which was at the stern of the ship on a lower deck, in a wide room that the sick shared with the rudder post, a large smoothed tree trunk thrusting through floor and ceiling. All of the other men were gravely ill. Manuel was miserable as they laid him down on his pallet, wretched with nausea and in great fear of the hospital, which smelled of putrefaction. The man on the pallet next to his was insensible, and rolled with the sway of the ship. Three candle-lanterns lit the low chamber and filled it with shadows.

One of the Dominican friars, a Friar Lucien, gave him hot water and wiped his face. They talked for a while, and the friar heard Manuel's confession, which only a proper priest should have done. Neither of them cared. The priests on board avoided the hospital, and tended to serve only the officers and the soldiers. Friar Lucien was known to be willing to minister to the sailors, and he was popular among them.

Manuel's fever got worse, and he could not eat. Days passed, and when he woke up the men around him were not the same men who had been there when he fell asleep. He became convinced he was going to die, and once again he felt despair that he had been made a member of the Most Fortunate Invincible Armada.

"Why are we here?" he demanded of the friar in a cracked voice. "Why shouldn't we let the English go to hell if they please?"

"The purpose of the Armada is not only to smite the heretic English," said Lucien. He held a candle closer to his book, which was not the Bible, but a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

slender little thing which he kept hidden in his robes. Shadows leaped on the blackened beams and planks over them, and the rudder post squeaked as it turned against the leather collar in the floor. "God also sent us as a test. Listen:

" 'I assume the appearance of a refiner's fire, purging the dross of forms outworn. This is mine aspect of severity; I am as one who testeth gold in a furnace. Yet when thou hast been tried as by fire, the gold of thy soul shall be cleansed, and visible as fire: then the vision of the Lord shall be granted unto thee, and seeing Him shall thou behold the shining one, who is thine own true self.'

"Remember that, and be strong. Drink this water here — come on, do you want to fail your God? This is part of the test."

Manuel drank, threw up. His body was no more than a tongue of flame contained by his skin, except where it burst out of his palms. He lost track of the days, and forgot the existence of anyone beyond himself and Friar Lucien. "I never wanted to leave the monastery," he told the friar, "yet I never thought I would stay there long. I've never stayed long anyplace yet. It was my home but I knew it wasn't. I haven't found my home yet. They say there is ice in England — I saw the snow in the Catalonian mountains once. Father, will we go home? I only want to return to the monastery and be a father like you."

"We will go home. What you will become, only God knows. He has a place for you. Sleep now. Sleep now."

By the time his fever broke his ribs stood out from his chest as clearly as the fingers of a fist. He could barely walk. Lucien's narrow face appeared out of the gloom clear as a memory.

"Try this soup. Apparently God has seen fit to keep you here."

"Thank you, Saint Anne, for your intercession," Manuel croaked. He drank the soup eagerly. "I want to return to my berth."

"Soon."

They took him up to the deck. Walking was like floating, as long as he held on to railings and stanchions. Laeghr greeted him with pleasure, as did his station mates. The world was a riot of blues; waves hissed past, low clouds jostled together in their rush east, tumbling between them shafts of sunlight that spilled onto the water. He was excused from active duty, but he spent as many hours as he could at his station. He found it hard to believe that he had survived his illness.

Of course, he was not entirely recovered; he could not yet eat any solids, particularly biscuit, so that his diet consisted of soup and wine. He felt weak, and perpetually light-headed. But when he was on deck in the wind he was sure that he was getting better, so he stayed there as much as possible. He was on deck, in fact, when they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

first caught sight of England. The soldiers pointed and shouted in great excitement, as the point Laeghr called the Lizard bounced over the horizon. Manuel had grown so used to the sea that the low headland rising off their port bow seemed unnatural, an intrusion into a marine world, as if the deluge were just now receding and these drowned hillsides were just now shouldering up out of the waves, soaking wet and covered by green seaweed that had not yet died. And that was England.

A few days after that they met the first English ships — faster than the Spanish galleons, but much smaller. They could no more impede the progress of the Armada than flies could slow a herd of cows. The swells became steeper and followed each other more closely, and the changed pitching of *La Lavia* made it difficult for Manuel to stand. He banged his head once, and another time ripped away a palmful of scabs, trying to keep his balance in the violent yawing caused by the chop. Unable to stand one morning, he lay in the dark of his berth, and his mates brought him cups of soup. That went on for a long time. Again he worried that he was going to die. Finally Laeghr and Lucien came below together.

"You must get up now," Laeghr declared. "We fight within the hour, and you're needed. We've arranged easy work for you."

"You have only to provide the gunners with slow match," said Friar Lucien as he helped Manuel to his feet. "God will help you."

"God will have to help me," Manuel said. He could see the two men's souls flickering above their heads: little triple knots of transparent flame, that flew up out of their hair and lit the features of their faces. "The gold of thy soul shall be cleansed, and visible as fire," Manuel recalled.

"Hush," said Lucien with a frown, and Manuel realized that what Lucien had read to him was a secret.

Amidships, Manuel noticed that now he was also able to see the air, which was tinged red. They were on the bottom of an ocean of red air, just as they were on top of an ocean of blue water. When they breathed they turned the air a darker red; men expelled plumes of air like horses breathing out clouds of steam on a frosty morning, only the steam was red. Manuel stared and stared, marveling at the new abilities God had given his sight.

"Here," Laeghr said, roughly directing him across the deck. "This tub of punk is yours. This is slow match, understand?" Against the bulkhead was a tub full of coils of closely braided cord. One end of the cord was hanging over the edge of the tub burning, fizzing the air around it to deep crimson.

Manuel nodded: "Slow match."

"Here's your knife. Cut sections about this long, and light them with a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

piece of it that you keep beside you. Then give sections of it to the gunners who come by, or take it to them if they call for it. But don't give away all your lit pieces. Understand?"

Manuel nodded that he understood and sat down dizzily beside the tub. One of the largest cannons poked through a port in the bulwarks just a few feet from him. Its crew greeted him. Across the deck his stationmates stood at their taffrail. The soldiers were ranked on the fore- and stern-castles, shouting with excitement, gleaming like shellfish in the sun. Through the port Manuel could see some of the English coast.

Laeghr came over to see how he was doing. "Hey, don't you lop your fingers off there, boy. See out there? That's the Isle of Wight. We're going to circle and conquer it, I've no doubt, and use it as our base for our attack on the mainland. With these soldiers and ships they'll *never* get us off that island. It's a good plan."

But things did not progress according to Laeghr's plan. The Armada swung around the east shore of the Isle of Wight, in a large crescent made of five distinct phalanxes of ships. Rounding the island, however, the forward galleasses encountered the stiffest English resistence they had met so far. White puffs of smoke appeared out of the ships and were quickly stained red, and the noise was tremendous.

Then the ships of El Draco swept around the southern point of the island onto their flank, and suddenly *La Lavia* was in the action. The soldiers roared and shot off their arquebuses, and the big cannon beside Manuel leaped back in its truck with a bang that knocked him into the bulkhead. After that he could barely hear. His slow match was suddenly in demand; he cut the cord and held the lit tip to unlit tips, igniting them with his red breath. Cannonballs passing overhead left rippling wakes in the blood air. Grimy men snatched the slow match and dashed to their guns, dodging tackle blocks that thumped to the deck. Manuel could see the cannonballs, big as grapefruit, flying at them from the English ships and passing with a whistle. And he could see the transparent knots of flame, swirling higher than ever about men's heads.

Then a cannonball burst through the porthole and knocked the cannon off its truck, the men to the deck. Manuel rose to his feet and noticed with horror that the knots of flame on the scattered gunners were gone; he could see their heads clearly now, and they were just men, just broken flesh draped over the plowed surface of the deck. He tried, sobbing, to lift a gunner who was bleeding only from the ears. Laeghr's cane lashed across his shoulders: "Keep cutting match! There's others to tend to these men!" So Manuel cut lengths of cord and lit them with desperate puffs and shaking hands, while the guns roared, and the exposed soldiers on the castles shrieked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

under a hail of iron, and the red air was ripped by passing shot.

The next few days saw several battles like that, as the Armada was forced past the Isle of Wight and up the Channel. His fever kept him from sleeping, and at night, Manuel helped the wounded on his deck, holding them down and wiping sweat from their faces, nearly as delirious as they were. At dawn he ate biscuits and drank from his cup of wine, and went to his tub of slow match to await the next engagement. *La Lavia*, being the largest ship on the left flank, always took the brunt of the English attack.

It was on the third day that *La Lavia*'s mainmast topgallant yard fell on his old taffrail crew, crushing Hanan and Pietro. Manuel rushed across the deck to help them, shouting his anguish. He got a dazed Juan down to their berth and returned amidships. Around him men were being dashed to the decks but he didn't care. He hopped through red mist that nearly obscured his sight, carrying lengths of match to the gun crews, who were now so depleted that they couldn't afford to send men to him. He helped the wounded below to the hospital, which had truly become an antechamber of hell; he helped toss the dead over the side, croaking a short prayer in every case; he ministered to the soldiers hiding behind the bulwarks, waiting vainly for the English to get within range of their arquebuses.

Now the cry amidships was "Manuel, match here! Manuel, some water! Help, Manuel!" In a dry fever of energy Manuel hurried to their aid.

He was in such perpetual haste that in the middle of a furious engagement he nearly ran into his patroness, Saint Anne, who was suddenly standing there in the corner by his tub. He was startled to see her.

"Grandmother!" he cried. "You shouldn't be here, it's dangerous."

"As you have helped others, I am here to help you," she replied. She pointed across the purplish chop to one of the English ships. Manuel saw a puff of smoke appear from its side, and out of the puff came a cannonball, floating in an arc over the water. He could see it as clearly as he could have seen an olive tossed at him from across a room: a round black ball, spinning lazily, growing bigger as it got closer. Now Manuel could tell that it was coming at him, *directly* at him, so that its trajectory would intersect his heart. "Um, blessed Anna," he said, hoping to bring this to his saint's attention. But she had already seen it, and with a brief touch to his forehead she floated up into the maintop, among the unseeing soldiers. Manuel watched her, eyeing the approaching cannonball's flight, knocking the ball downward into the hull where it stuck, half-embedded in the thick wood. Manuel stared at the black half-sphere, mouth open. He waved up at Saint Anna,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who waved back and flew up into the red clouds towards heaven. Manuel kneeled and said a prayer of thanks to her, and to Jesus for sending her, and went back to cutting match.

A night or two later — Manuel himself was not sure, as the passage of time had become for him something pliable and elusive and, more than anything else, meaningless — the Armada anchored at Calais Roads, just off the Flemish coast. For the first time since they had left Corunna, *La Lavia* lay still, and listening at night Manuel realized how much the constant chorus of wooden squeaks and groans was the voice of the crew, and not the ship. He drank his ration of wine and water quickly, and walked the length of the lower deck, talking with the wounded and helping when he could to remove splinters. Many of the men wanted him to touch them, for his safe passage through some of the worst scenes of carnage had not gone unnoticed. He touched them and, when they wanted, said a prayer.

Afterwards he went up on deck. There was a fair breeze from the southwest, and the ship rocked ever so gently on the tide. For the first time in a week the air was not suffused red: Manuel could see stars, and distant bonfires on the Flemish shore, like stars that had fallen and now burnt out their life on the land.

Laeghr was limping up and down amidship, detouring from his usual path to avoid a bit of shattered decking.

"Are you hurt, Laeghr?" Manuel inquired.

For answer Laeghr growled. Manuel walked beside him. After a bit Laeghr stopped and said, "They're saying you're a holy man now because you were running all over the deck these last few days, acting like the shot we were taking was hail and never getting hit for it. But I say you're just too foolish to know any better. Fools dance where angels would hide. It's part of the curse laid on us. Those who learn the rules and play things right end up getting hurt — sometimes from doing just the things that will protect them the most. While the blind fools who wander right into the thick of things are never touched."

Manuel watched Laeghr's stride. "Your foot?"

Laeghr shrugged. "I don't know what will happen to it."

Under a lantern Manuel stopped and looked Laeghr in the eye. "Saint Anna appeared and plucked a cannonball that was heading for me right out of the sky. She saved my life for a purpose."

"No." Laeghr thumped his cane on the deck. "Your fever has made you mad, boy."

"I can show you the shot!" Manuel said. "It stuck in the hull!" Laeghr stumped away.

Manuel looked across the water at Flanders, distressed by Laeghr's words,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and by his hobbled walk. He saw something he didn't comprehend.

"Laeghr?"

"What?" came Laeghr's voice from across midships.

"Something bright ... the souls of all the English at once, maybe...." his voice shook.

"What?"

"Something coming at us. Come here, master."

Thump, thump, thump. Manuel heard the hiss of Laeghr's indrawn breath, the muttered curse.

"Fireships," Laeghr bellowed at the top of his lungs. "Fireships! Awake!"

In a minute the ship was bedlam, soldiers running everywhere. "Come with me," Laeghr told Manuel, who followed the sailing master to the forecastle, where the anchor hawser descended into the water. Somewhere along the way Laeghr had gotten a halberd, and he gave it to Manuel. "Cut the line."

"But master, we'll lose the anchor."

"Those fireships are too big to stop, and if they're hellburners they explode and kill us all. Cut it."

Manuel began chopping at the thick hawser, which was very like the trunk of a small tree. He chopped and chopped, but only one strand of the huge rope was cut when Laeghr seized the halberd and began chopping himself, awkwardly to avoid putting his weight on his bad foot. They heard the voice of the ship's captain — "Cut the anchor cable!" — and Laeghr laughed.

The rope snapped, and they were floating free. But the fireships were right behind them. In the hellish light Manuel could see English sailors walking on their burning decks, passing through the flames like salamanders or demons. No doubt they were devils. The fires towering above the eight fireships shared the demonic life of the English; each tongue of yellow flame contained an English demon eye looking for the Armada, and some of these leaped free of the blaze that twisted above the fireships, in vain attempts to float onto *La Lavia* and incinerate it.

Manuel held off these embers with his wooden medallion, and the gesture that in his boyhood in Sicily had warded off the evil eye. Meanwhile the ships of the fleet were cut loose and drifting on the tide, colliding in the rush to avoid the fireships. Captains and officers screamed furiously at their colleagues on other ships, but to no avail. In the dark and without anchors, the ships could not be regathered, and as the night progressed most were blown out into the North Sea. For the first time the neat phalanxes of the Armada were broken, and they were never to be reformed again.

When it was all over *La Lavia* held its position in the North Sea by sail, while the officers attempted to identify the ships around them, and to find out what Medina Sidonia's orders were. Manuel and Juan stood amidships with the rest of their berthmates. Juan

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shook his head. "I used to make corks in Portugal. We were like a cork back there in the Channel, being pushed into the neck of a bottle. As long as we were stuck in the neck we were all right — the neck got narrower and narrower, and they might never have gotten us out. Now the English have pushed us right down into the bottle itself. We're floating about in our own dregs. And we'll never get out of the bottle again."

"Not through the neck, anyway," one of the others agreed.

"Not any way."

"God will see us home," Manuel said.

Juan shook his head.

Rather than try to force the Channel, Admiral Medina Sidonia decided that the Armada should sail around Scotland, and then home. Laeghr was taken to the flagship for a day to help chart a course, for he was familiar with the north as none of the Spanish pilots were.

The battered fleet headed away from the sun, ever higher into the cold North Sea. After the night of the fireships Medina Sidonia had restored discipline with a vengeance. One day the survivors of the many Channel battles were witness to the hanging from the yardarm of a captain who let his ship get ahead of the admiral's flagship, a position which was now forbidden. A carrack sailed through the fleet again and again so every crew could see the corpse of the disobedient captain, swinging freely from its spar.

Manuel observed the sight with distaste. Once dead, a man was only a bag of bones; nowhere in the clouds overhead could he spot the captain's soul. Perhaps it had plummeted into the sea, on its way to hell. It was an odd transition, death. Curious that God did not make more explicit the aftermath.

So *La Lavia* faithfully trailed the admiral's flagship, as did the rest of the fleet. They were led farther and farther north, into the domain of cold. Some mornings when they came on deck in the raw yellow of dawn the riggings would be rimed with icicles, so that they seemed strings of diamonds. Some days it seemed they sailed across a sea of milk, under a silver sky. Other days the ocean was the color of a bruise, and the sky a fresh pale blue so clear that Manuel gasped with the desire to survive this voyage and live. Yet he was as cold as death. He remembered the burning nights of his fever as fondly as if he were remembering his first home on the coast of North Africa.

All the men were suffering from the cold. The livestock was dead, so the galley closed down: no hot soup. The admiral imposed rationing on everyone, including himself; the deprivation kept him in his bed for the rest of the voyage. For the sailors, who had to haul wet or frozen rope, it was worse. Manuel watched the grim faces, in line

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for their two biscuits and one large cup of wine and water — their daily ration — and concluded that they would continue sailing north until the sun was under the horizon and they were in the icy realm of death, the north pole where God's dominion was weak, and there they would give up and die all at once. Indeed, the winds drove them nearly to Norway, and it was with great difficulty that they brought the shot-peppered hulks around to a westerly heading.

When they did, they discovered a score of new leaks in *La Lavia*'s hull, and the men, already exhausted by the effort of bringing the ship about, were forced to man the pumps around the clock. A pint of wine and a pint of water a day were not enough. Men died. Dysentery, colds, the slightest injury: all were quickly fatal.

Once again Manuel could see the air. Now it was a thick blue, distinctly darker where men breathed it out, so that they all were shrouded in dark blue air that obscured the burning crowns of their souls. All of the wounded men in the hospital had died. Many of them had called for Manuel in their last moments; he held their hands or touched their heads, and as their souls had flickered away from their heads like the last pops of flame out of coals of a dying fire, he had prayed for them. Now other men too weak to leave their berths called for him, and he went and stood by them in their distress. Two of these men recovered from dysentery, so his presence was requested even more frequently. The captain himself asked for Manuel's touch when he fell sick; but he died anyway, like most of the rest.

One morning Manuel was standing with Laeghr at the midships bulkhead. It was chill and cloudy, the sea the color of flint. The soldiers were bringing their horses up and forcing them over the side, to save water.

"That should have been done as soon as we were forced out of the Sleeve," Laeghr said. "Waste of water."

"I didn't even know we had horses aboard," Manuel said.

Laeghr laughed briefly. "Boy, you are a prize of a fool. One surprise after another."

They watched the horses' awkward falls, their rolling eyes, their flared nostrils expelling clouds of blue air. Their brief attempts to swim.

"On the other hand, we should probably be eating some of those," Laeghr said.

"Horsemeat?"

"It can't be that bad."

The horses all disappeared, exchanging blue air for flint water. "It's cruel," Manuel said.

"In the horse latitudes they swim for an hour," Laeghr said. "This is better." He pointed to the west. "See those tall clouds?"

"Yes."

"They stand over the Orkneys. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Orkneys or the Shetlands, I can't be sure any more. It will be interesting to see if these fools can get this wreck through the islands safely." Looking around, Manuel could spot only a dozen or so ships; presumably, the rest of the Armada lay over the horizon ahead of them. He stopped to wonder about what Laeghr had just said, for it would naturally be Laeghr's task to navigate them through the northernmost of the British Isles; at that very moment Laeghr's eyes rolled like the horses' had, and he collapsed on the deck. Manuel and some other sailors carried him down to the hospital.

"It's his foot," said Friar Lucien. "His foot is crushed and his leg has putrefied. He should have let me amputate."

Around noon Laeghr regained consciousness. Manuel, who had not left his side, held his hand, but Laeghr frowned and pulled it away.

"Listen," Laeghr said with difficulty. His soul was no more than a blue cap covering his tangled salt-and-pepper hair. "I'm going to teach you some words that may be useful to you later." Slowly he said, "*Tor conaloc an dhia,*" and Manuel repeated it. "Say it again." Manuel repeated the syllables over and over, like a Latin prayer. Laeghr nodded. "*Tor conaloc an naom dhia.* Good. Remember the words always." After that he stared at the deckbeams above, and would answer none of Manuel's questions. Emotions played over his face like shadows, one after another. Finally he took his gaze from the infinite and looked at Manuel. "Touch me, boy."

Manuel touched his forehead, and with a sardonic smile Laeghr closed his eyes: his blue crown of flames flickered up through the deck above and disappeared.

They buried him that evening, in a smoky, hellish brown sunset. Friar Lucien said the shortened Mass, mumbling in a voice that no one could hear, and Manuel pressed the back of his medallion against the cold flesh of Laeghr's arm, until the impression of the cross remained. Then they tossed him overboard. Manuel watched with a serenity that surprised him. Just weeks ago he had shouted with rage and pain as his companions had been torn apart; now he watched with a peace he did not understand as the man who had taught him and protected him sank into the iron water and disappeared.

A couple of nights after that Manuel sat apart from his remaining berthmates, who slept in one pile like a litter of kittens. He watched the blue flames wandering over the exhausted flesh, watched without reason or feeling. He was tired.

Friar Lucien looked in the narrow doorway and hissed. "Manuel! Are you there?"

"I'm here."

"Come with me."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Manuel got up and followed him. "Where are we going?"

Friar Lucien shook his head. "It's time." Everything else he said was in Greek. He had a little candle lantern with three sides shuttered, and by its illumination they made their way to the hatch that led to the lower decks.

Manuel's berth, though it was below the gun deck, was not on the lowest deck of the ship. *La Lavia* was very much bigger than that. Below the berth deck were three more decks that had no ports, as they were beneath the waterline. Here in perpetual gloom were stored the barrels of water and biscuit, the cannonballs and rope and other supplies. They passed by the powder room, where the armorer wore felt slippers so that a spark from his boots might not blow up the ship. They found a hatchway that held a ladder leading to an even lower deck. At each level the passages became narrower, and they were forced to stoop.

Manuel was astounded when they descended yet again, for he would have imagined them already on the keel, or in some strange chamber suspended beneath it; but Lucien knew better. Down they went, through a labyrinth of dank black wooden passageways. Manuel was long lost, and held Lucien's arm for fear of being separated from him, and becoming hopelessly trapped in the bowels of the ship. Finally they came to a door that made their narrow hallway a dead end. Lucien rapped on the door and hissed something, and the door opened, letting out enough light to dazzle Manuel.

After the passageways, the chamber they entered seemed very large. It was the cable tier, located in the bow of the ship just over the keel. Since the encounter with the fireships, *La Lavia* had little cable, and what was left lay in the corners of the room. Now it was lit by candles, set in small iron candelabra that had been nailed to the side beams. The floor was covered by an inch of water, which reflected each of the candle flames as a small spot of white light. The curving walls dripped and gleamed. In the center of the room a box had been set on end, and covered with a bit of cloth. Around the box stood several men: a soldier, one of the petty officers, and some sailors Manuel knew only by sight. The transparent knots of cobalt flame on their heads added a bluish cast to the light in the room.

"We're ready, Father," one of the men said to Lucien. The friar led Manuel to a spot near the upturned box, and the others arranged themselves in a circle around him. Against the aft wall, near gaps where floor met wall imperfectly, Manuel spotted two big rats with shiny brown fur, all ablink and twitch-whiskered at the unusual activity. Manuel frowned and one of the rats plopped into the water covering the floor and swam under the wall, its tail swishing back and forth like a small snake, revealing to Manuel its true nature. The other rat stood its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ground and blinked its bright little round eyes as it brazenly returned Manuel's unwelcoming gaze.

From behind the box Lucien looked at each man in turn, and read in Latin. Manuel understood the first part: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible...." From there Lucien read on, in a voice powerful yet soothing, entreatful yet proud. After finishing the creed he took up another book, the little one he always carried with him, and read in Spanish:

" 'Know ye, O Israel, that what men call life and death are as beads of white and black strung upon a thread; and this thread of perpetual change is mine own changeless life, which bindeth together the unending string of little lives and little deaths.

" 'The wind turns a ship from its course upon the deep: the wandering winds of the senses cast man's mind adrift on the deep.

" 'But lo! That day shall come when the light that *is* shall still all winds, and bind every hideous liquid darkness; and all thy habitations shall be blest by the white brilliance which descendeth from the crown.' "

While Lucien read this, the soldier moved slowly about the chamber. First he set on the top of the box a plate of sliced biscuit; the bread was hard, as it became after months at sea, and someone had taken the trouble to cut slices, and then polish them into wafers so thin that they were translucent, and the color of honey. Occasional wormholes gave them the look of old coins that had been beaten flat and holed for use as jewelry.

Next the soldier brought forth from behind the box an empty glass bottle, with its top cut off so that it was a sort of bowl. Taking the flask in his other hand, he filled the bowl to the midway point with *La Lavia*'s awful wine. Putting the flask down, he circled the group while the friar finished reading. Every man there had cuts on his hands that more or less continuously leaked blood, and each man pulled a cut open over the bottle held to him, allowing a drop to splash in, until the wine was so dark that to Manuel, aware of the blue light, it was a deep violet.

The soldier replaced the bottle beside the plate of wafers on the box. Friar Lucien finished his reading, looked at the box, and recited one final sentence: "O, lamps of fire! make bright the deep caverns of sense; with strange brightness give heat and light together to your beloved, that we may be one with you." Taking the plate in hand, he circled the chamber, putting a wafer in the mouths of the men. "The body of Christ, given for you. The body of Christ, given for you."

Manuel snapped the wafer of biscuit between his teeth and chewed it. At last he understood what they were doing. This was a communion for the dead: a service for Laeghr, a service for all of them, for they were all doomed. Beyond the damp curved wall of their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chamber was the deep sea, pressing against the timbers, pressing in on them. Eventually they would all be swallowed, and would sink down to become food for the fishes, after which their bones would decorate the floor of the ocean, where God seldom visited. Manuel could scarcely get the chewed biscuit past the lump in his throat. When Friar Lucien lifted the half-bottle and put it to his lips, saying first, "The blood of Christ, shed for you," Manuel stopped him. He took the friar's hand. The soldier stepped forward, but Lucien waved him away. The the friar kneeled before Manuel and crossed himself, but backwards as Greeks did, left to right rather than the proper way.

Manuel said, "You are the blood of Christ," and held the half-bottle to Lucien's lips, tilting it so he could drink.

He did the same for each of the men, the soldier included. "You are the Christ." This was the first time any of them had partaken of this part of the communion, and some of them could barely swallow. When they had all drunk, Manuel put the bottle to his lips and drained it to the dregs. "Friar Lucien's book says, all thy habitations shall be blest by the white brilliance that is the crown of fire, and we shall all be made the Christ. And so it is. We drank, and now we are the Christ. See" — he pointed at the remaining rat, which was now on its hind legs, washing its forepaws so that it appeared to pray, its bright round eyes fixed on Manuel — "even the beasts know it." He broke off a piece of biscuit wafer, and leaned down to offer it to the rat. The rat accepted the fragment in its paws, and ate it. It submitted to Manuel's touch.

Standing back up, Manuel felt the blood rush to his head. The crowns of fire blazed on every head, reaching far above them to lick the beams of the ceiling, filling the room with light— "He is here!" Manuel cried, "He has touched us with light, see it!" He touched each of their foreheads in turn, and saw their eyes widen as they perceived the others' burning souls in wonder, pointing at each other's heads; then they were all embracing in the clear white light, hugging one another with the tears running down their cheeks and giant grins splitting their beards. Reflected candlelight danced in a thousand parts on the watery floor. The rat, startled, splashed under the gap in the wall, and they laughed and laughed and laughed.

Manuel put his arm around the friar, whose eyes shone with joy. "It is good," Manuel said when they were all quiet again. "God will see us home."

They made their way back to the upper decks like boys playing in a cave they know very well.

The Armada made it through the Orkneys without Laeghr, though it was a close thing for some ships. Then they were out in the North Atlantic, where the swells were broader, their troughs deeper, and their tops as high

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as the castles of *La Lavia*, and then higher than that.

Winds came out of the southwest, bitter gales that never ceased, and three weeks later they were no closer to Spain than they had been when they slipped through the Orkneys. The situation on *La Lavia* was desperate, as it was all through the fleet. Men on *La Lavia* died every day, and were thrown overboard with no ceremony except the impression of Manuel's medallion into their arms. The deaths made the food and water shortage less acute, but it was still serious. *La Lavia* was now manned by a ghost crew, composed mostly of soldiers. There weren't enough of them to properly man the pumps, and the Atlantic was springing new leaks every day in the already broken hull. The ship began taking on water in such quantities that the acting captain of the ship — who had started the voyage as third mate — decided that they must make straight for Spain, making no spare leeway for the imperfectly known west coast of Ireland.

This decision was shared by the captains of several other damaged ships, and they conveyed their decision to the main body of the fleet, which was reaching farther west before turning south to Spain. From his sickbed Medina Sidonia gave his consent, and *La Lavia* sailed due south.

Unfortunately, a storm struck from just north of west soon after they had turned homeward. They were helpless before it. *La Lavia* wallowed in the troughs and was slammed by crest after crest, until the poor hulk lay just off the lee shore, Ireland.

It was the end, and everyone knew it. Manuel knew it because the air had turned black. The clouds were like thousands of black English cannonballs, rolling ten deep over a clear floor set just above the masts, and spitting lightning into the sea whenever two of them banged together hard enough. The air beneath them was black as well, just less thick: the wind as tangible as the waves, and swirling around the masts with smoky fury. Other men caught glimpses of the lee shore, but Manuel couldn't see it for the blackness. These men called out in fear; apparently the western coast of Ireland was sheer cliff. It was the end.

Manuel had nothing but admiration for the third-mate-now-captain, who took the helm and shouted to the lookout in the top to find a bay in the cliffs they were drifting towards. But Manuel, like many of the men, ignored the mate's commands to stay at post, as they were clearly pointless. Men embraced each other on the castles, saying their farewells; others cowered in fear against the bulkheads. Many of them approached Manuel and asked for a touch, and Manuel brushed their foreheads as he angrily marched about the forecastle. As soon as Manuel touched them, some of the men flew directly up toward heaven while others

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dove over the side of the ship and became porpoises the moment they struck the water. But Manuel scarcely noticed these occurrences, as he was busy praying, praying at the top of his lungs.

"*Why* this storm, Lord, *why?* First there were winds from the north holding us back, which is the only reason I'm here in the first place. So you wanted me here, but why why why? Juan is dead and Laeghr is dead and Pietro is dead and Habedeen is dead and soon we will all be dead, and why? It isn't just. You promised you would take us home." In a fury, he took his slow-match knife, climbed down to the swamped midships, and went to the mainmast. He thrust the knife deep into the wood, stabbing with the grain. "There! I say *that* to your storm!"

"Now, that's blasphemy," Laeghr said as he pulled the knife from the mast and threw it over the side. "You know what stabbing the mast means. To do it in a storm like this — you'll offend gods a lot older than Jesus, and more powerful, too."

"Talk about blasphemy," Manuel replied. "And you wonder why you're still wandering the seas a ghost, when you say things like that. You should take more care." He looked up and saw Saint Anne, in the maintop giving directions to the third mate. "Did you hear what Laeghr said?" he shouted up to her. She didn't hear him.

"Do you remember the words I taught you?" Laeghr inquired.

"Of course. Don't bother me now. Laeghr; I'll be a ghost with you soon enough." Laeghr stepped back, but Manuel changed his mind, and said, "Laeghr, why are we being punished like this? We were on a crusade for God, weren't we? I don't understand."

Laeghr smiled and turned around, and Manuel saw then that he had wings, wings with feathers intensely white in the black murk of the air. He clasped Manuel's arm. "You know all that I know." With some hard flaps he was off, tumbling east swiftly in the black air, like a gull.

With the help of Saint Anne the third mate had actually found a break in the cliffs, a quite considerable bay. Other ships of the Armada had found it as well, and they were already cracking up on a wide beach as *La Lavia* limped near shore. The keel grounded and immediately things began breaking. Soupy waves crashed over the canted midships, and Manuel leaped up the ladder to the forecastle, which was now under a tangle of rigging from the broken foremast. The mainmast went over the side, and the lee flank of the ship splintered like a match tub and flooded, right before their eyes.

Among the floating timbers Manuel saw one that held a black cannonball embedded in it, undoubtedly the very one that Saint Anne had deflected from its course toward him. Reminded that she had saved his life before, Manuel grew calmer and waited for her to appear. The beach was only a few

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ship-lengths away, scarcely visible in the thick air; like most of the men, Manuel could not swim, and he was searching with some urgency for a sight of Saint Anne when Friar Lucien appeared at his side, in his black robes. Over the shriek of the dark wind Lucien shouted, "If we hold on to a plank we'll float ashore."

"You go ahead," Manuel shouted back. "I'm waiting for Saint Anna." The friar shrugged. The wind caught his robes and Manuel saw that Lucien was attempting to save the ship's liturgical gold, which was in the form of chains that were now wrapped around the friar's middle. Lucien made his way to the rail and jumped over it, onto a spar that a wave was carrying away from the ship. He missed his hold on the rounded spar, however, and sank instantly.

The forecastle was now awash, and soon the foaming breakers would tear it loose from the keel. Most of the men had already left the wreck, trusting to one bit of flotsam or other. But Manuel still waited. Just as he was beginning to worry he saw the blessed grandmother of God, standing among figures on the beach that he perceived but dimly, gesturing to him. She walked out onto the white water, and he understood. "We are the Christ, of course! I will walk to shore as He once did." He tested the surface with one shoe; it seemed a little, well, infirm, but surely it would serve — it would be like the floor of their now-demolished chapel, a sheet of water covering one of God's good solids. So Manuel walked out onto the next wave that passed at the level of the forecastle, and plunged deep into the brine.

"Hey!" he spluttered as he struggled back to the surface. "Hey!" No answer from Saint Anne this time; just cold salt water. He began the laborious process of drowning, remembering as he struggled a time when he was a child, and his father had taken him down to the beach in Morocco, to see the galley of the pilgrims to Mecca rowing away. Nothing could have been less like the Irish coast than that serene, hot, tawny beach, and he and his father had gone out into the shallows to splash around in the warm water, chasing lemons. His father would toss the lemons out into the deeper water, where they bobbed just under the surface, and then Manuel would paddle out to retrieve them, laughing and choking on water.

Manuel could picture those lemons perfectly, as he snorted and coughed and thrashed to get his head back above the freezing soup one more time. Lemons bobbing in the green sea, lemons oblong and bumpy, the color of the sun when the sun is its own width above the horizon at dawn ... bobbing gently just under the surface, with a knob showing here and there. Manuel pretended he was a lemon, at the same time that he tried to remember the primitive dogpaddle that had gotten him around the shallows. Arms,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pushing downward. It wasn't working. Waves tumbled him, lemonlike, in towards the strand. He bumped on the bottom and stood up. The water was only waist deep. Another wave smashed him from behind and he couldn't find the bottom again. Not fair! he thought. His elbow ran into sand, and he twisted around and stood. Knee deep, this time. He kept an eye on the treacherous waves as they came out of the black, and trudged through them up to a beach made of coarse sand, covered by a mat of loose seaweed.

Down on the beach a distance were sailors, companions, survivors of the wrecks offshore. But there among them — soldiers on horses. English soldiers, on horses and on foot — Manuel groaned to see it — wielding swords and clubs on exhausted men strewn across the seaweed. "No!" Manuel cried, "No!" But it was true. "Ah, God," he said, and sank till he was sitting. Down the strand soldiers clubbed his brothers, splitting their fragile eggshell skulls so that the yolk of their brains ran into the kelp.

Manuel beat his insensible fists against the sand. Filled with horror at the sight, he watched horses rear in the murk, giant and shadowy. They were coming down the beach towards him. "I'll make myself invisible," he decided. "Saint Anna will make me invisible." But remembering his plan to walk on the water, he determined to help the miracle, by staggering up the beach and burrowing under a particularly tall pile of seaweed. He was invisible without it, of course, but the cover of kelp would help keep him warm. Thinking such thoughts, he shivered and shivered and on the still land fell insensible as his hands.

When he woke up, the soldiers were gone. His fellows lay up and down the beach like white driftwood; ravens and wolves already converged on them. He couldn't move very well. It took him half an hour to move his head to survey the beach, and another half hour to free himself from his pile of seaweed. And then he had to lie down again.

When he regained consciousness, he found himself behind a large log, an old piece of driftwood that had been polished silver by its years of rolling in the sand. The air was clear again. He could feel it filling him and leaving him, but he could no longer see it. The sun was out; it was morning, and the storm was over. Each movement of Manuel's body was a complete effort, a complete experience. He could see quite deeply into his skin, which appeared pickled. He had lost all of his clothes, except for a tattered shred of trousers around his middle. With all his will he made his arm move his hand, and with his stiff forefinger he touched the driftwood. He could feel it. He was still alive.

His hand fell away in the sand. The wood touched by his finger was chang-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing, becoming a bright green spot in the surrounding silver. A thin green sprig bulged from the spot, and grew up toward the sun; leaves unfolded from this sprout as it thickened, and beneath Manuel's fascinated gaze a bud appeared and burst open: a white rose, gleaming wetly in the white morning light.

He had managed to stand, and cover himself with kelp, and walk a full quarter of a mile inland, when he came upon people. Three of them, to be exact, two men and a woman. Wilder-looking people Manuel couldn't imagine: the men had beards that had never been cut, and arms like Laeghr's. The woman looked exactly like his miniature portrait of Saint Anne, until she got closer and he saw that she was dirty and her teeth were broken and her skin was brindled like a dog's belly. He had never seen such freckling before, and he stared at it, and her, every bit as much as she and her companions stared at him. He was afraid of them.

"Hide me from the English, please," he said. At the word *English* the men frowned and cocked their heads. They jabbered at him in a tongue he did not know. "Help me," he said. "I don't know what you're saying. Help me." He tried Spanish and Portuguese and Sicilian and Arabic. The men were

Special offer from the award-winning SF magazine: A full year (12 issues) of F&SF for only $15.97, saving you $5.03 off the newsstand price.

+ Ten time winner of the Hugo award for best SF magazine or best editor.
+ Publisher of more Nebula award winning stories (selected by the Science Fiction Writers of America) than any other publication.
+ Winner of the 1977, 1978, 1979 and 1980 Locus polls as best SF magazine.
+ Winner of the World Fantasy Award, 1979, 1982; Balrog Award, 1981.

Please use the coupon on the reverse side; it is backed by this copy, and removal does not affect the text of the story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looking angry. He tried Latin, and they stepped back. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and in all things visible and invisible." He laughed, a bit hysterically. "Especially invisible." He grabbed his medallion and showed them the cross. They studied him, clearly at a loss.

"*Tor conaloc an dhia*," he said without thinking. All four of them jumped. Then the two men moved to his sides to hold him steady. They chattered at him, waving their free arms. The woman smiled, and Manuel saw that she was young. He said the syllables again, and they chattered some more. "Thank you, Laeghr," he said. "Thank you, Anna. Anna," he said to the girl, and reached for her. She squealed and stepped back. He said the phrase again. The men lifted him, for he could no longer walk, and carried him across the heather. He smiled and kissed both men on the cheek, which made them laugh, and he said the magic phrase again and started to fall asleep and said the phrase. *Tor conaloc an dhia.* The girl brushed his wet hair out of his eyes; Manuel recognized the touch, and he could feel the flowering begin inside him.

Give mercy for God's sake.

FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753 3-83

☐ **Yes, send me 12 issues of F&SF, the award-winning magazine, for only $15.97, saving $5.03 off the newsstand price**

☐ **Check here if you would like to extend or renew your current sub.**

Name _____

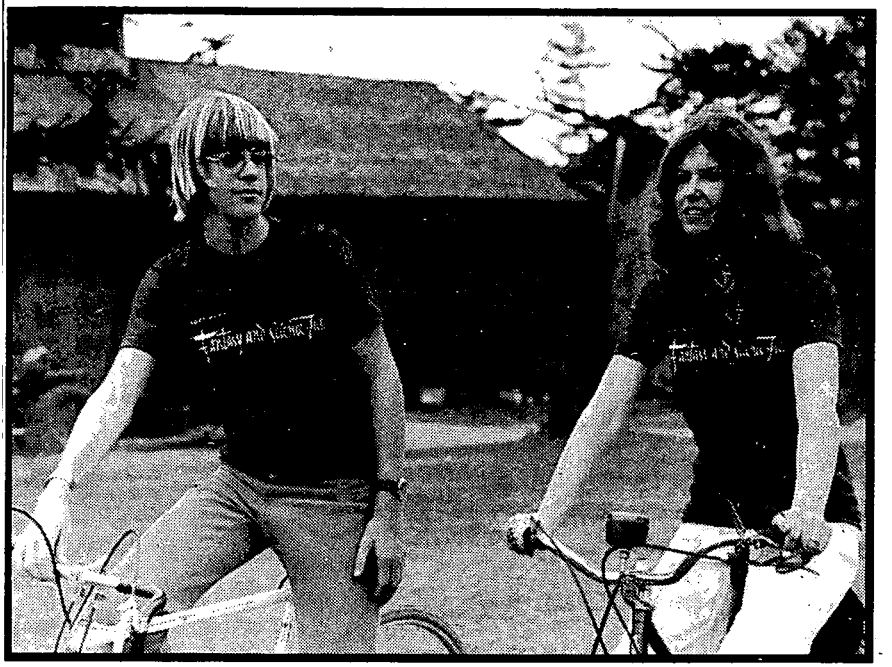
Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

Outside the U.S., please add $2.00 for postage. Please make all checks payable in U.S. dollars.
Allow six weeks for delivery of first copy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

F&SF T-Shirts in Two Colors



FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, Ct. 06753

Send me _____ F&SF shirts at $6.50 each, enclosed.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

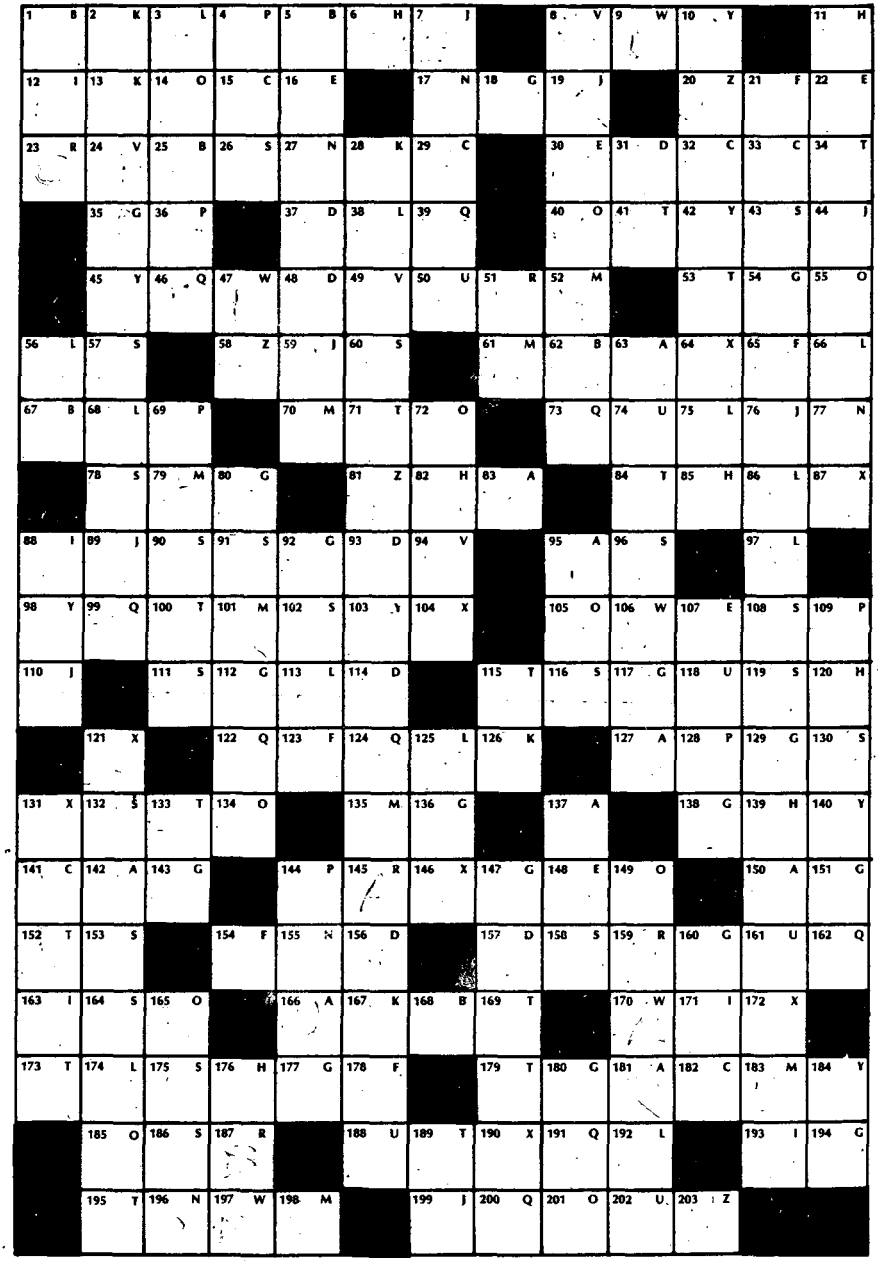
Small ☐ Medium ☐ Large ☐ Extra Large ☐

☐ Red ☐ Navy

F&SF T-shirts make a great gift and are available only from this magazine at the bargain price of $6.50 each, which includes postage and handling. These handsome shirts come in navy blue with the original F&SF logo imprinted in white, or in red with blue imprinting. All sizes in stock and shipped as soon as we receive the coupon or a separate order.

Add $1.00 for Canadian and foreign postage.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Acrostic Puzzle

by Rachel Cosgrove Payes

This puzzle contains a quotation from a science fiction story. First, guess the clues and write the word in the numbered blanks beside the clues. Put these letters in the matching blocks in the puzzle. (The end of the line is not necessarily the end of a word. Words end with black squares.) If your clue words are correct, you will see words forming in the puzzle blocks. If you can guess some of these words, put the letters into the blanks for the clues, over the appropriate numbers. This will help to guess more words. The first letters of the correctly worked clues spell the name of the author and the title of the sf work from which the quotation is taken.

A. THE _____ about early sf.

127	166	150	63	181	95	137	142	83	

B. Croquet maneuver.

24	168	62	5	67	1

C. What man continues to do.

15	182	141	29	32	33

D. Utterly.

157	48	31	114	37	93	156

E. _____ SISTER, GREEN BROTHER, S. J. Van Scyoc.

107	30	148	22	16

F. _____ YES, TERRA NO!, Emil Petaja.

123	21	65	178	154

G. Brian Aldiss volume, (four words).

92	54	35	147	151	180	117	138	194	136

177	112	160	18	80	129	143

H. Space scientist

139	6	176	11	85	82	120

I. Nail obliquely a second time.

171	12	193	88	163

J. Harkonnen's follower.

59	19	44	76	7	110	199	89

K. *Galileo's bookish feature,* The _____

28	13	126	167	2

L. Nebula winner was in this volume, (two words).

125	3	113	56	174	68	75	66	97	192

38	86

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

M. _____ _____ _____
VULTURE, by Ron Goulart, (three wds).

61	52	198	135	70	101	79	183	

N. Gunslinger Roland's tally.

155	196	17	27	77

O. By Walter Dean Myers.

40	72	201	185	134	105	165	55	149	14

P. Exertion of power.

109	36	144	4	128	69

Q. Niven award winner.

124	46	191	200	73	99	39	122	162

R. Warrior's trophy.

187	23	145	51	159

S. THE _____ _____, Delany's corner (two words).

60	26	153	90	111	57	132	164	91	175

186	158	102	78	119	130	108	43	116	96

T. Le Guin novel, (two wds).

84	71	195	152	169	100	133	179	34	115

189	41	173	53

U. Wrote 'A'.

118	161	202	188	74	50

V. Engrave with acid.

94	24	49	8

W. Of BLIND VOICES fame.

47	9	170	197	106

X. THE _____ MONSTER, by R. L. Burrill.

172	64	104	87	190	131	121	146

Y. Grants.

42	140	98	103	10	45	184

Z. Eye of _____

203	20	81	58

Answer will appear in the April issue.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy & Science Fiction

MARKET PLACE

BOOKS-MAGAZINES

S-F FANTASY MAGAZINES, BOOKS. Big 1983 catalog $1.00. Collections purchased (large or small). Robert Madle, 4406 Bestor Dr., Rockville, MD 20853.

FREE SAMPLE, next issue FANTASY MONGERS Quarterly. 25¢ contribution (not required). WEIRDBOOK, Box 149, Buffalo, NY 14226.

BACK ISSUES of Science Fiction and Fantasy magazines are our specialty. Send for free catalog. Overseas requests welcome. Also, highest prices paid for collections, large or small. Ray Bowman, Box 5845F, Toledo, Ohio 43613.

SOFT BOOKS, 89 Marion Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6R 1E6. Buy, Sell, Arkham's, Grant's, etc. Catalogues issued.

SEND 25¢ FOR CATALOG of Scientifantasy books & pulps. Canford, Drawer 216, Freeville, NY 13068.

60,000 SF and Mystery paperbacks, hardcovers, magazines in stock. Free catalogs. Box F-86A, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

SCIENTIFANTASY SPECIALIST: Books, magazines. 20¢ stamp for catalog. Gerry de la Ree, Cedarwood, Saddle River, NJ 07458.

USED SF PAPERBACKS, $1 each; Hardcovers $3 each; No Choice: We buy also; Lucks, 845 Pleasure Road, B11, Lancaster, Penna. 17601.

FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS CREATED JESUS, authored Gospels, Positive proof, scholarly booklet. $3.00-Vector, Box 6215-B, Bellevue, WA 98007.

BOUGHT, SOLD, TRADED, SF&F 1st editions, pulps, digests. Send 2 stamps for 1982 gigantic 15,000 item catalog. Graham Holroyd, 778 Spencerport Rd., Rochester, NY 14606.

SF BOOKS at a discount: Write for free catalog: Luna City Books, Box 19960, Baltimore, MD 21211.

New, used, out of print books. Discounts. FREE CATALOG. Allen Sherman, 49 Fieldstone Road, Staten Island, NY 10314.

AUTOGRAPHED British hardcover, DYING OF THE LIGHT by George RR Martin. Hugo finalist. $11 from George RR Martin, 1205 Declovina, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501.

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS — Highest prices paid! Fantasy Archives, 71 Eighth Ave., NYC 10014.

HARDCOVER SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY. Reasonable Prices. Free Lists. Norman Syms, 8 Broadmoor Vale, Upper Weston, Bath, Avon, England BA1 4LP.

FOREIGN EDITIONS OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. Copies of French, German, Spanish, Japanese and Swedish editions available at $2.50 each, three for $7.00. Mercury Press, Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753.

ATTRACTIVE 55-page SF book catalog: dollar, refundable. CHRIS DRUMM, POB 445, Polk City, Iowa 50226.

MOONSTONE BOOKCELLARS, INC. 2145 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20037. (202) 659-2600. Science Fiction, Fantasy and Mysteries.

VAMPIRES! Learn the facts behind the fiction. Send $2. to L. Sheefer, Box 43, Cortland, IL 60122.

WANTED: SF First Editions. Marietta Corporation, POB 147, Marietta, PA 17547. Phone: (717) 426-1472.

SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY Catalog. O-P 1st Edition Hardcovers. OTHERWORLDS, 23834 Wendover, Beachwood, OH 44122.

Do you have something to advertise to sf readers? Books, magazines, typewriters, telescopes, computers, space-drives, or misc. Use the F&SF Market Place at these low, low rates: $7.50 for minimum of ten (10) words, plus 75 cents for each additional word. Frequency discount: 10% for six consecutive insertions, 15% for twelve consecutive insertions. Send copy and remittance to: Adv. Dept., Fantasy and Science Fiction, P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEND FOR FREE LIST of Science Fiction hardcover books. Reader's Roost Inc., 915 Roanoke Ave., Hillside, NJ 07205.

THE LITERATURE OF FANTASY & Science Fiction is remarkably complete at The Science Fiction Shop, 56 Eighth Ave., NY, NY 10014. Worldwide mail-order. Catalogue mailing-list free US/Canada; $1.00 - all other. Phone orders welcome. (212) 741-0270.

SPECULATIVE FICTION MISCELLANY: Annotated catalog. Write DMK BOOKS, 22946 Brenford, Woodland Hills, CA 91364.

CLOTHING

F&SF T-SHIRTS. Navy blue with original magazine logo imprinted in white OR: Red shirt with blue logo. Sm, med, large, extra-large. $6.50 each. Mercury Press, Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753.

SCIENTIFIC-HUMOROUS T-shirt catalog. 150 plus items! Send SASA to Softwear Unlimited, SR Box 38, Winthrop, WA 98862. Wholesaler inquiries welcome.

HYPNOTISM

Hypnotism Revealed. Free illustrated details. Powers, 12015SF Sherman Road, North Hollywood, California 91605.

INSTRUCTION

SCIENTIFIC ASTROLOGICAL courses. Write Eternal Enterprises, Box 60913V, Sacramento, CA 95860.

MISCELLANEOUS

ESP LABORATORY. This new research service group can help you. For FREE information write: Al G. Manning, ESP Laboratory, 7559 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90046.

PLAY SPROUTS challenging topological puzzle-game, easy to genius levels; two or more players, Teams or Solo. Fascination guaranteed! Just $3 to: Buck, 1523A North La Brea, Suite, 180-F, Los Angeles, CA 90028.

MILLIONS in Canadian Lotteries. $10 for a ticket, $1 for particulars. WINDFALL, Box 39, Site 5, RR2, Stonyplain, Canada 2T0 G0E.

$10.00 GIFT WITH ORDER! Astrology/Fantasy gift collection. Jewelry, Books, T-shirts... Free catalog. Write: Dragon's Head, Box 3103-E, Pismo Beach, California 93449.

SUPER CHESS — Rules For New Game. Send $2.00, SASE to PO Box 3682, Stanford, CA 94305.

BEST CHEESECAKE in the galaxy! Easy and delicious! Plus bonus. Send $2.00 to Oli, Box 244, Annandale, NJ 08801.

BIORHYTHMS - one year chart. $3.50 and birthdate to Microbits, PO Box 15522, Lakewood, Colo. 80215-0522.

EVENTS WANTED for FantasyLair '83 Gaming Convention. FRP, wargaming, SF, computers. March 25-27, Tonkawa, OK. Details, NOD, POB 241, Ponca City, OK 74602.

PERSONAL

THE MOST EXCITING penpal club for adults the world over. Free details. INTI-MATES International, POB 69190 Stn K, Vancouver, B.C. Canada V5K 4W4.

LONELY? Nationwide club for both sexes. Send stamp. Exciting, Box 324, Ontario, Calif. 91761.

JAPANESE GIRLS make wonderful wives. Let us introduce you to an unspoiled Oriental beauty. $2 brings photos, descriptions, application. Japan International, Box 156-FSF, Carnelian Bay, CA 95711.

PRIVATE ADDRESS. Confidential Services. Professional Mail Forwarding, Box 561-J, Milton, Mass 02186.

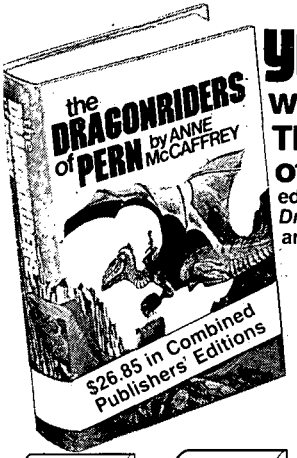
EXOTIC ASIAN GIRLS — individual introductions. Information, photos $2. Equator, Box 570311-KC, Miami, Fla. 33157.

SINGLE? Meet that special person! Call DATELINE — free: 800-451-3245.

RECORDS/TAPES

GREAT RADIO PROGRAMS! Science-Fiction, Mystery, Adventure. Free list cassettes. Rare Radio, Box 117-F, Sunland, Calif. 91040.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

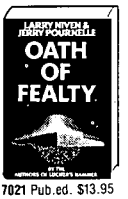


YOURS FREE with membership The DRAGONRIDERS of PERN

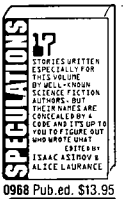
One mammoth edition including all 3 novels: *Dragonflight, Dragonquest,* and *The White Dragon.*

7328 Pub.ed. $15.95

*9597 Pub.ed. $16.95



7021 Pub.ed. $13.95


SPECULATIONS
17 STORIES WRITTEN ESPECIALLY FOR THIS VOLUME BY WELL-KNOWN SCIENCE FICTION AUTHORS. BUT THEIR NAMES ARE CONCEALED BY A CODE AND IT'S UP TO YOU TO FIGURE OUT WHO WROTE WHAT
EDITED BY ISAAC ASIMOV & ALICE LAURANCE

0968 Pub.ed. $13.95

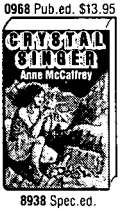
† 0679 Spec.ed.

5116 Pub.ed. $14.95

0174 Pub.ed. $17.50

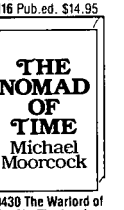
*2840 Comb.pub.ed. $26.90

0927 Pub.ed. $12.95



8938 Spec.ed.

0497 Nonfiction. Pub.ed.$14.95



0430 The Warlord of the Air; The Land Leviathan; The Steel Tsar. Spec.ed.

And take any 4 for $1 WITH MEMBERSHIP

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR ADDITIONAL SELECTIONS.

How the Club works:

When your application for membership is accepted, you'll receive your choice of any 4 books for only $1 (plus shipping and handling) and a free copy of *The Dragonriders of Pern.* You may examine the 4 books in your home and, if not completely satisfied, return them within 10 days—membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing. The free book is yours to keep in any case.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come,* describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. In addition, up to 4 times a year you may receive offers of special Selections, always at low Club prices. If you want the 2 Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically.

If you don't want a Selection, prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided and return it to us by the date specified.

We allow you at least 10 days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days and receive an unwanted Selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter or continue to enjoy Club benefits for as long as you wish. One of the 2 Selections each month is only $3.98. Other Selections are higher, but always much less than hardcover publishers' editions—up to 65% off! A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments. Send no money now, but do mail the coupon today!

'Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.

Note: Prices shown are publishers' edition prices.

† STAR TREK Is A Trademark Of Paramount Pictures Corporation Registered In The U.S. Patent And Trademark Office
Copyright © 1982 By Paramount Pictures Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB

Dept. GR-078, Garden City, N.Y. 11530

Please accept my application for membership. Send me the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated below plus my FREE book and bill me just $1 (plus shipping and handling). I agree to the Club Plan as described in this ad. I will take 4 more books at regular low Club prices during the coming year and may resign any time thereafter. The FREE book will be mine to keep whether or not I remain a member. SFBC offers serious works for mature readers.

FREE BOOK	1.	2.	3.	4.

Mr.
Ms. _____
(Please print)

Address _____ Apt. # _____

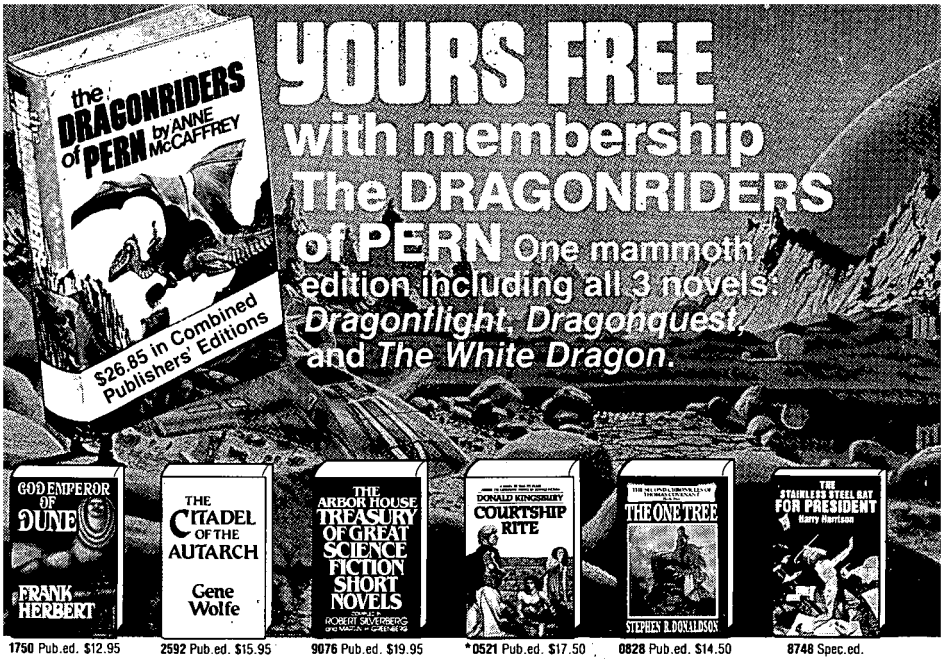
City _____

State _____ Zip _____

If under 18, parent must sign. _____

The Science Fiction Book Club offers complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and, save you even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Canada. Offer slightly different in Canada. 25-S233 C

LICENSED TO NZ.STUFF
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


the DRAGONRIDERS of PERN by ANNE McCAFFREY
$26.85 in Combined Publishers' Editions
YOURS FREE
with membership
The DRAGONRIDERS of PERN One mammoth edition including all 3 novels: Dragonflight, Dragonquest, and The White Dragon.

1750 Pub.ed. $12.95

2592 Pub.ed. $15.95

9076 Pub.ed. $19.95

*0521 Pub.ed. $17.50

0828 Pub.ed. $14.50

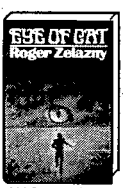
8748 Spec.ed.

*4200 Pub.ed. $16.00

0455 Pub.ed. $19.95

1651 Spec.ed.

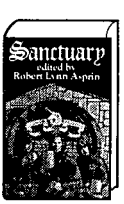
2980 Pub.ed. $9.95



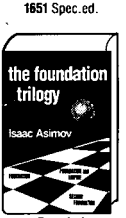
4036 Pub.ed. $13.95

1057 Pub.ed. $12.50

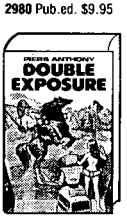
0075 All 5 Amber novels. 2 vols. Comb.pub.ed. $32.30



0539 Thieves' World; Tales from the Vulgar Unicorn; Shadows of Sanctuary. Spec.ed.



6221 Foundation; Foundation and Empire; Second Foundation. Comb.pub.ed. $23.85



5637 Split Infinity; Blue Adept; Juxtaposition. Comb. pub.ed. $34.40

6197 The Riddle-Master of Hed; Heir of Sea and Fire; Harpist in the Wind. Comb.pub.ed. $24.85

1958 Twelve Fair Kingdoms; The Grand Jubilee; And Then There'll Be Fireworks. Comb.pub.ed. $31.85

AND TAKE ANY 4 FOR $1

WITH MEMBERSHIP

See other side for coupon and additional Selections.

THE SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB

25-S233 C

ote: Prices shown are publishers' edition prices.

*Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED